

# An Assault on Our Future:

The impact of violence on young people and their relationships



**A White Ribbon Foundation Report**

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The White Ribbon Foundation aims to eliminate violence against women. The Foundation engages men and boys to actively oppose violence against women and promote a culture of non-violence and respect.



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## Introduction

It is widely recognised that violence against women is a significant problem affecting as many as one in three women in Australia. This widespread violence has impacts more widely on families and communities throughout our society.

This report examines how violence against women specifically affects children and young people. It looks at the nature of violence they experience in their homes and their own relationships, its impacts, and the priorities for action if efforts to prevent violence among, and protect, young people are to be successful.

Why focus on children and young people?

- Young people are already being exposed to, and influenced by, domestic violence.
- Young people are already being subjected to, and perpetrating, violence themselves.
- Violence-supportive attitudes, norms, and relations are already visible among young people.
- Violence prevention among children and young people has been shown to work.

## Part One: Living with adult violence

- One in four 12-20 year-old Australians surveyed was aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers by their fathers or step-fathers.
- Children and young people are also victims of direct violence by adults.
- Exposure to domestic violence is itself a form of abuse.
- Domestic violence has a clear and negative impact on children's and young people's behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning and social development.
- There is a high economic cost to the violence experienced by children and young people.
- Children's and young people's education and later employment prospects are harmed by domestic violence.

- Living with domestic violence can shape young people's attitudes to violence in positive or negative directions.
- Young men who have experienced domestic violence are more likely to perpetrate violence in their own relationships, although the majority do not.

## Part Two: Dating and relationship violence among young people

- While physical aggression by both males and females is relatively common in young people's relationships, young women face particularly high risks of violence and are more likely to be physically injured.
- Girls and young women suffer more, they are more afraid, and they experience much more sexual violence than boys and young men.
- Girls and young women face high risks of sexual violence and harassment including high levels of sexual harassment in schools.

### The impact of dating and relationship violence on girls, young women and adult women

- Experiencing dating and relationship violence at any age has a profound negative impact on women's health and well-being. This impact is long-term and cumulative.
- When young women experience physical violence in relationships, this violence is often serious and involves injuries.
- Intimate partner violence against young women often includes significant harm to the sexual and reproductive health of women who are pregnant or parenting.
- Domestic violence has negative impacts on every domain of women's lives, including their parenting.
- A man using physical violence against his girlfriend or wife typically also uses a range of other abusive, controlling, and harmful behaviours.
- Violence against women can be fatal.

## Part Three: The causes of violence against girls and young women

- Men's violence against girls and women has causes which can be grouped into three clusters. These are:

### Gender roles and relations

- Young people's vulnerability to violence in relationships is heightened by strong peer norms, inexperience, age differences in relationships, and lack of access to services.
- Among young people, attitudes towards intimate partner violence are worst among younger males.
- Males are more likely to accept violence against females if they have traditional gender-role attitudes.
- Male-dominated dating relationships and sexist peer cultures are also key risk factors for violence.
- Young people's violence-supportive attitudes and norms are shaped by pornography and other media.
- At the same time, a majority of young men believe that violence against women is unacceptable.

### Social Norms and Practices Relating to Violence

- Violence is invisible and 'normal' among young people.
- Violence in the community, exposure to violent relationships among peers and childhood exposure to family violence are all risk factors for intimate partner violence.

### Access to resources and systems of support

- Social disadvantage is a risk factor for violence.
- Young women who are socially isolated are more at risk.
- Personality disorders and adolescent delinquency increase males' likelihood of perpetrating violence.
- Alcohol and drugs may be used by some males to avoid responsibility for perpetrating violence or as a strategy to overcome resistance.
- Relationship break-up and separation are particularly risky periods for violence by partners or ex-partners.

## Part Four: Prevention among children and young people

### Violence prevention education programs among children and young people can work.

- Programs have been shown to produce positive and lasting change in attitudes and behaviours.
- Prevention strategies can lessen girls' and women's risks of victimisation.
- School-based efforts are complemented by strategies of community engagement and community mobilisation.
- Violence prevention efforts must be sensitive to cultural contexts and the needs of different groups.

### We must address boys and men

- Efforts to engage boys and men must involve not only education but activism.
- Prevention programs should be tailored for males' levels of risk.

### We must continue to address girls and women

- Historically, girls and women have been the focus, and this can be victim-blaming.
- Programs and strategies for males and females should collaborate and complement each other.

### We must address children and young people already living with violence

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Vastly increased efforts need to be made, and resources mobilised, at national, state, and local levels, in the area of primary prevention of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on children and young people. A multi-faceted prevention strategy, which engages boys and young men, is essential to maximising positive outcomes for all children and young people. It should be recognised from the outset that there are no 'quick fixes' for the long-term social change towards which prevention efforts are directed. However, there is a sound and growing evidence base for the effectiveness of this work.

**Please see the full text of the Recommendations.**



# Introduction

It is widely recognised that violence against women is a significant problem affecting as many as one in three women in Australia. This widespread violence has impacts more widely on families and communities throughout our society.

This report examines how violence against women specifically affects children and young people. It looks at the nature of violence they experience in their homes and their own relationships, its impacts, and the priorities for action if efforts to prevent violence among, and protect, young people are to be successful.

It provides the evidence base and rationale for prioritising a prevention focus on young people. Our approach covers both 'primary' and 'secondary' forms of prevention. 'Primary' prevention refers to strategies aimed at preventing the occurrence of violence in the first place. 'Secondary' prevention refers to strategies aimed at reducing opportunities for or the likelihood of violence by supporting the individuals who are at risk of perpetrating or being subjected to violence. It is in this spirit that this report devotes attention to the children and young people who are already living with violence in their families. However, we advocate an overarching emphasis on primary prevention.

Before outlining the report, we begin by briefly spelling out the rationale for focusing on children and young people.

## Why focus on children and young people?

Large numbers of children and young people live with violence against their mothers or step-mothers, as well as experience or perpetrate violence themselves, whether in the home, the school yard or their own dating relationships. From an early age, all children and young people are exposed to an array of messages condoning discrimination and violence against women from a number of sources, including the media, pornography and 'macho' peer cultures in institutions from schools to sporting clubs.

The overall impact created by the cumulative experience of, and exposure to, such violence and violence-supportive messages severely limits children's and young people's capacity to imagine alternatives and build peaceful and egalitarian futures for themselves, and for Australian society. The active promotion of non-

violent, non-discriminatory cultures in schools and other institutional settings has the potential to 'open up' these possibilities for children and young people. Violence prevention strategies such as educational programs and awareness-raising campaigns can give children and young people the opportunity to create positive, respectful relationships, personal identities, and peer cultures, both now and in the future.

In order to prevent violence against women and girls, there are five good reasons to focus efforts on children and young people.<sup>1</sup> We outline these briefly below, and return to them in more detail in the sections which follow.

### **Young people are already being exposed to, and influenced by, domestic violence.**

Children and young people are exposed to high levels of violence-supportive messages in the media and wider community. Violence against women continues to be tolerated by a large number of Australians (VicHealth 2006). Many children and young people experience violence in their homes, with one in four young people reportedly having witnessed an act of physical violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001). UNICEF estimates that between 75,000 to 640,000 Australian children and young people are living with domestic violence (UNICEF 2006). In addition to the impact on individual women, children and young people, such violence also has significant social, health and economic costs, and can have an impact on children and young people's later relationships.

### **Young people are already being subjected to, and perpetrating, violence themselves.**

As well as experiencing violence by their parents and other family members, young people – and especially girls and young women – can suffer violence in their own dating relationships. Young women face high risks of violence, including a particularly high risk of sexual violence. Large numbers of girls and young women are forced, coerced, or pressured into unwanted sexual activity. Like violence against adult women, dating and relationship violence has a profound impact on girls' and young women's health and well-being. Substantial numbers of boys and young men use physical violence or sexual violence or report a willingness to do so.

<sup>1</sup> 'Children' in this report are defined as 13 years and under, and 'young people' as 14-24 years.

## **Violence-supportive attitudes, norms, and relations are already visible among young people.**

Third, among children and young people there is already some degree of tolerance for violence against girls and women. Younger males are particularly likely to endorse violence against women, some gender norms among teenagers 'normalise' sexual coercion, and substantial proportions of young men continue to be tolerant of intimate partner violence (Flood and Pease 2006). This does not mean that violence prevention strategies among young people necessarily are 'too late', but it does mean that they must address already existing patterns of dating violence and normative supports for this.

## **Violence prevention among children and young people has been shown to work.**

In violence prevention, perhaps the most obvious rationale for 'starting young' is that adolescence is a crucial period in terms of women's and men's formation of healthy, non-violent relationships later in life (National Campaign Against Violence and Crime 1998: 23). Males' and females' adult relationships are shaped in important ways by the norms and practices they take on in adolescence. Interventions at this stage can change young people's personal and relationship trajectories. Thus, dollars and effort put in early can save much greater expenses and trauma in adult life.

Violence prevention among children and young people has been shown to work. Intensive and long-term education programs in schools do produce lasting change in attitudes and behaviours, as various North American evaluations demonstrate (Flood 2005-2006). In Australia, very little of the violence prevention efforts underway in primary and secondary schools has been evaluated, and school-based education requires expansion, technical development (training and resources), and systematic evaluation. In addition, there are sound reasons for also enacting interventions with children and young people in non-school settings. We explore violence prevention efforts among children and young people in Part Four.

## **This report**

*An Assault on Our Future* documents the extent and impact of violence among children and young people, and it provides a framework for primary prevention strategies among children and young people. Because of the scope of the topic, the report has in many cases been informed by reviews of the literature and meta-evaluations as well as primary research publications.

The report is in four main parts. Part One focuses on the nature and level of adult-perpetrated violence experienced by young people, and its short-term and long-term impacts. It also looks at the potential effect of such violence on their later relationships.

Part Two looks at the nature and extent of violence used and experienced by young people in their own dating relationships, and the short-term and long-term impacts of this violence.

Part Three documents the causes of violence against girls and young women, providing an explanation of why this violence occurs.

Finally, Part Four establishes that we can make a difference to violence in Australia. In particular, it outlines the evidence that primary prevention strategies can improve the attitudes, norms, and inequalities which feed into violence against girls and women. The report concludes with recommendations for action at the policy and community levels.

## A note on language

### **There is a wide variety of terms to describe violence.**

There is a bewildering variety of terms with which to describe forms of interpersonal violence. Each term includes and excludes some forms of violence, tends to be accompanied by certain theoretical and political claims, and is subject to shifting meanings because of both academic and popular trends. We briefly outline these issues below.

### **Specific terms include, and exclude, certain forms of violence.**

The term 'domestic violence' refers to interpersonal violence which takes place in domestic settings, family relationships, and intimate relationships, and is most commonly applied to violence by a man to his wife, female sexual partner or ex-partner. However, 'domestic violence' is used also to refer to violence between same-sex sexual partners, among family members (including siblings and parent-child violence either way), and by women against male partners. Three other terms commonly applied to some or all of these forms of violence are family violence, men's violence against women, and intimate violence, while newer terms include relationship violence, intimate partner violence, and gender-based violence.

Many definitions of 'domestic violence' centre on violence between sexual partners or ex-partners, excluding parent-child, sibling-sibling, and adolescent-parent violence (Macdonald 1998: 10). 'Domestic' violence often takes place in non-domestic settings, such as when young women experience dating violence in a boyfriend's car or other semi-public place. Definitions of 'domestic violence' or 'partner violence' may exclude violence in relationships where the sexual partners have neither married nor cohabited (Jasinski and Williams 1998: x). 'Domestic violence' is often understood as distinct from sexual violence, but the two often are intertwined in violence against women by male partners or ex-partners. While the phrase 'family violence' more clearly includes violence against children and between family members, its usefulness is affected by how one understands the term 'family' (Macdonald 1998: 12-13).

Both terms 'domestic violence' and 'family violence' have been criticised for deflecting attention from the sex of the likely perpetrator (male), likely victim (female), and the gendered character of the violence (Maynard and Winn 1997: 180). Yet the alternative phrase 'men's violence against women' excludes violence against children or men and by women. Finally, the term 'gender-based violence' does not necessarily mark off any particular form of interpersonal violence, as most if not all forms of interpersonal aggression are arguably gendered.

### **Violence itself can be defined in narrow or broad ways.**

A common, although narrow, way to define violence is to focus on physically aggressive acts. For example, one school of research within domestic violence research uses the term 'violence' to refer to any "act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to another person" (Gelles 1997: 14). For "family conflict" researchers therefore, domestic violence is defined by the presence of physically violent behaviour by an individual to another person with whom they have or have had a sexual, intimate, or familial relationship. While this definition focuses only on physically aggressive acts, others are much broader. For example, a discussion of relationship violence among young people defines this as referring to:

any attempt to control or dominate another person physically, sexually, or psychologically, causing some level of harm... Harm may result from aggression that is physical (e.g., hitting, punching, shoving), sexual (e.g., nonconsensual sex, unwanted touching), and psychological (e.g., isolating self/partner, name-calling, threats to harm self/other) (Wekerle and Wolfe 1999: 436).

Proponents of the narrow definition of domestic violence above measure its occurrence using a tool called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS). The CTS asks one partner in a relationship whether, in the last year, they or their spouse have ever committed any of a range of violent acts such as hit with a fist or an object, slapped, shaken, or kicked, their partner. The value of such a definition is that it names any physical aggression between sexual partners or ex-partners rightly as 'domestic violence', sending the message that such violence is unacceptable. However, this definition hides important variations in the meaning, consequences, and context of violent behaviours in relationships.



There is growing scholarly recognition that there are different patterns of physical aggression in relationships. Research among adult heterosexual couples finds that some relationships suffer from occasional outbursts of violence by either husbands or wives during conflicts, what Johnson (1995: 284-285) terms 'common couple violence.' Here, the violence is relatively minor, both partners practise it, it tends to express emotion rather than a deliberate attempt at power and control, it tends not to get worse over time, and injuries are rare. In situations of 'intimate terrorism' on the other hand, one partner (usually the man) uses violence and other controlling tactics to assert power and authority or to restore them when they are perceived to be breaking down. The violence is more severe, it is asymmetrical (used by one person rather than by both), it is being used deliberately to assert power and control, it tends to get worse over time, and injuries are more likely.

Methods for measuring violence such as the Conflict Tactics Scale (above) are inadequate for describing or explaining the violent acts of men and women. Instruments focused on 'counting the blows' do not tell us whether violence was part of a systematic pattern of physical abuse or an isolated incident, whether it was initiated or in self-defence, whether it was accompanied by (other) strategies of power and control, or whether it involved fear. Such approaches are unable to distinguish between distinct patterns of violence in heterosexual couples, and they leave out important forms of violence (Dobash and Dobash 2004).

Of course, any physical aggression between intimate partners is unacceptable, whether minor or severe, whether mutual or one-way. At the same time, it is crucial to recognise the distinctive dynamics which characterise typical situations of domestic violence.

**Domestic violence refers to a systematic pattern of power and control, involving physical and non-physical tactics of abuse and coercion.**

Violence prevention advocates typically use the term 'domestic violence' to refer to a systematic pattern of power and control exerted by one person (usually a man) against another (often a woman), involving a variety of physical and non-physical tactics of abuse and coercion, in the context of a current or former intimate relationship.

Recognition of such patterns informs some researchers' argument that domestic violence or intimate partner abuse can be best understood as chronic behaviour that is characterized not by the episodes of physical violence which punctuate the relationship but by the emotional and psychological abuse that the perpetrator uses to maintain control over their partner. In fact, many female victims report that the physical violence they suffer is less damaging than the relentless psychological abuse that cripples and isolates them.

Women may see the emotional impact of physical aggression as more significant than the physical impact, and the emotional impact is influenced as much by judgements of threat and intent to harm and their own self-blame as by the degree of force used or injury caused (Gordon 2000: 759). In addition, women may experience the impact of non-physical tactics of control and abuse – controlling their movements, destroying property, verbal abuse, mind games, and so on – as more damaging than physical aggression.

### **Any act of naming involves choices.**

The names chosen to describe and explain forms of interpersonal violence will never perfectly contain the phenomenon (Macdonald 1998: 36), and any act of naming involves methodological, theoretical, and political choices.

In *An Assault on Our Future*, we have drawn on a wide variety of scholarship on diverse forms of interpersonal violence. We use the term 'violence' to refer to physical and/or sexual violence. We use the terms 'domestic violence' and 'intimate partner violence' to refer to physical or sexual violence by individuals against intimate partners or ex-partners, while recognising that many studies and accounts focus only on physical violence in such circumstances. We use the term 'dating and relationship violence' to refer to physical or sexual violence in young people's sexual relationships in particular.

# Part One: Living with adult violence

*I witnessed my mother bleeding on the head because there were thrown objects, heavy thrown objects. And I witnessed a lot of verbal abuse. I witnessed my father hitting the rest of my siblings, including myself. Possibly, it's hard to tell, when I was eleven (it was dark) I heard my father get into my sister's bed and my sister saying 'No, no, no.'*  
(Angela, speaking as an adult of her childhood experiences, in Howard & Rottam 2008: 26)

## The nature of children's and young people's experience of domestic violence

### Many children and young people in Australia live with domestic violence.

A large number of children and young people in Australia live with domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers, and a large number of children and young people live with direct violence against themselves from adults in their homes (National Crime Prevention 2001). It is often difficult, however, to draw a distinction between children and young people's experience of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers and the experience of direct child abuse.<sup>2</sup>

*I feel like it's my fault.*

(Young person interviewed for the Bursting the Bubble project on how abuse affected them, Domestic Violence Resource Centre of Victoria 2008)

To clarify, domestic violence is perpetrated in the vast majority of cases by men against women (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006) and is a 'gendered' crime. It is supported by sexist and discriminatory attitudes towards women and serves to reinforce male power. While all violence could be said to be 'gendered' (given social constructions which have traditionally valued male dominance, defined 'aggression' as a masculine characteristic, and condoned its use by men), and while

violence against children can certainly be theorised as an abuse of patriarchal power, it is not so clearly a sexist act. It may be perpetrated against children and young people of either sex, and by mothers as well as fathers (Tomison 2000). The two forms of violence are therefore in some ways distinct, and may be theorised as having different causal factors. However this distinction becomes clouded by the way in which children and young people experience violence in their homes.

### Children's experiences of witnessing domestic violence and of being subjected to violence themselves overlap, and there may be little difference between these.

Even when children or young people are not direct victims of violence, being exposed to violence against their mothers or step-mothers can have profound psychological effects on them, comparable to those of experiencing violence directly. The impacts of living with domestic violence pervade many aspects of children's and young people's lives. For example, a literature review undertaken for the Scottish Government (Humphreys, Houghton and Ellis 2008) found a consensus in the research that negative developmental and behavioural outcomes for children witnessing domestic violence were similar to those of children who had experienced direct physical violence (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). In addition to the heightened risk of direct physical violence against them, children and young people exposed to domestic violence suffer the psychological, emotional and behavioural consequences of living with the threat of terrorising behaviours<sup>3</sup> (Brown and Endekov 2005).

### Exposure to domestic violence is itself a form of abuse.

Recent research has made clear that defining children's exposure to violence as mere 'witnessing'<sup>4</sup> may limit our understanding of the complex ways in which children are 'pulled in' to the violence.

<sup>2</sup> Child abuse includes physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse and neglect.

<sup>3</sup> Terrorising behaviours include (but are not limited to) witnessing harm to someone in the family, threats of harm to the child or someone or something else, threats to send the child away, and making the child do something that frightened them (Cawson et al 2000).

<sup>4</sup> The terms 'experiencing' or 'living with' domestic violence are therefore preferred in this report, though 'witnessing' is used when referring to original research which employs the term.

Lesley Laing's review of the research found that children and young people are not and cannot be 'passive onlookers in families where there is domestic violence: they are actively involved in seeking to make meaning of their experiences' and find ways of dealing with the atmosphere of fear, distress and uncertainty created (Laing 2000: 1). The negative impacts of domestic violence on young people's emotional well-being, development and health have therefore led us to define domestic violence in the presence of children as a form of child abuse in itself (UNICEF 2006; James 1994).<sup>5</sup>

However, while the evidence supports the position that exposure to domestic violence is a form of psychological child abuse, care must be taken as to how this conceptualisation is interpreted in law and social service responses. Concerns have been raised that such a position may contribute to the unwillingness of mothers and children to seek help and assistance, for fear that children will be removed. Another concern is that positioning domestic violence as a form of child abuse may result in increased 'mother-blaming' for domestic violence. The authors of the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence report, *Children, Young People and Domestic Violence*, point out that:

The co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse highlights the vulnerability and powerlessness of children in society and within the social construct of the family. In situations of child abuse, the onus is on the state to act on behalf of the child, while in situations of domestic violence, the onus is on the non-perpetrating parent to act on the child's behalf, no matter what the skills, health or abilities of the parent are (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2003a: 38).

While recognising exposure to domestic violence as a form of child abuse, it is essential therefore to maintain the onus of responsibility for the abuse on the perpetrator of the violence itself, and not on the women who experience it. Women experiencing violence have a host of emotional, psychological, financial and social issues to negotiate. Many are acutely aware of the impact of the violence on children or young people in their care, and indeed threats made against their children, or actual violence against them, is a common reason why many women report trying to leave a violent relationship (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996).

Separation, furthermore, does not necessarily lessen the extent or impact of the violence, with much male violence increasing post-separation. Perpetrators may threaten children's health or well-being as a form of emotional abuse of their mother, or hold children hostage in an attempt to control women or make them return (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). In the worst cases, perpetrators may kill children in order to punish their partners, particularly after separation or divorce (Bagshaw and Chung 2000). Women may also be aware that separation, and the issues of child contact arrangements it raises, may have a further negative impact on children by 'moving them into the centre' of the conflict (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2003a; Laing 2000).

The Scottish literature review came to the conclusion that the division between direct and indirect abuse of children living with domestic violence was not the most effective means of assessing risk and severity of the harms caused by the violence, and advocated instead a holistic analysis and response to individual children's experience (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). In this section, therefore, we distinguish between the 'witnessing' and 'direct experience' of violence only when considering the extent of such violence in statistical terms. However, we analyse the impacts of domestic violence on children and young people in terms of the type of harm caused, and only distinguish between the 'witnessing' and 'direct experience' of the violence where the original research clearly makes such a distinction.

<sup>5</sup> Exposure to domestic violence is now defined as a form of child abuse in several Australian jurisdictions, including the ACT (Children and Young People Act 1999) and Tasmania (Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997).

## The extent of domestic violence experienced by young people

**One in four 12-20 year-old Australians surveyed was aware of domestic violence against their mothers or step-mothers by their fathers or step-fathers.**

*He could have stuck a knife in her for all I know, with the door shut. And the worst thing for me was actually not knowing what was happening then and not knowing what was going to happen next. That was the most frightening thing for me.*  
(Regina, aged 9, in Houghton 2008: 35, citing McGee, 2000)

In a survey of 5,000 young Australians aged 12-20<sup>6</sup> (National Crime Prevention 2001):

- One in four (23.4%) reported having witnessed an act of physical violence by their father or step-father against their mother or step-mother (this included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things).
- Over half (58%) had witnessed their father or step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother.
- 31 per cent had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her.
- 11 per cent had seen their father/or step-father prevent their mother or step-mother from seeing her family or friends.
- Almost two-thirds of these young people had told someone else about the abuse they were witnessing: usually friends, other family members who didn't live with them, or an older adult friend.
- Only a few had rung police or called a support service.

In a separate survey asking adults about their experiences of violence (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006, the *Personal Safety Survey*):

- Over half (57.4%) of all women who had experienced violence by a current partner reported that they had children in their care at some time during the relationship.

- Over a third (34%) said that these children had witnessed the violence.
- A greater percentage still (39.5%) said that children in their care had witnessed violence by a *previous* partner.

However, these latter figures may underestimate children's awareness of domestic violence, as it is difficult to protect children from exposure to violence happening within their homes. For instance, two different international studies reported 86 per cent and 85 per cent respectively of children either in the same or adjoining rooms during an incident of domestic violence (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). Children may also "be woken and hear part of the violence; they may see the bruising and distress of their mothers and the broken and damaged property when they return from school or wake up in the morning" (Laing 2000: 2).

The National Crime Prevention survey (2001) noted that young people in certain groups were living with higher rates of domestic violence than the average. The authors were careful to note, however, that there was nothing inherent in the qualities of individual members of such groups that made them more 'prone' to perpetrating or experiencing violence, but rather that a number of factors interacted in each case to increase the likelihood of violence occurring and continuing, not least of which is women and children's capacity (or otherwise) to escape violent situations.

*I'm too embarrassed to tell anyone.*  
(Bursting the Bubble)

For example, young people of lower socioeconomic status were about one and a half times more likely to be aware of violence in their homes than those from upper socioeconomic households (National Crime Prevention 2001). While this may reflect increased incidence of domestic violence in disadvantaged communities (see Part Three), another contributing factor to this figure may be young people's increased awareness of violence in more confined living arrangements, where it is harder for men to hide the violence from other members of the household.

<sup>6</sup>This national survey was undertaken in 1998 and 1999 by the Crime Research Centre at the University of Western Australia and Donovan Research, partly funded by the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Initiative. This was the largest piece of research on this age group on the subject of violence ever conducted in Australia.

There is also the likelihood that women's limited financial capacity to leave the relationship would increase incidence rates in lower socio-economic households.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were significantly more likely to have witnessed physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother than the average (42%, compared to 23% for all respondents). High rates of poverty among Aboriginal and Islander people would obviously impact in similar ways on women's financial capacity to leave violent relationships, as would the lack of culturally-specific support services (SNAICC 2005a). The Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care also points to the profound and ongoing impact of dispossession and colonisation on family and gender relations in Aboriginal and Islander communities (SNAICC 2005a), as well as the intergenerational effects of previous separation from families, potentially undermining parenting and relationship skills (Commonwealth of Australia 1997). These factors, alone and cumulatively, have been put forward as contributing to high rates of domestic/family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the National Crime Prevention survey found that young people who did not live with both parents were more likely to have been aware of domestic violence in their household. That is, young people living with their mother and her partner were at greatest risk of experiencing (or having experienced) domestic violence. The authors note, however, that this risk is not attributable solely to the current partner's violence. Given that the research asked about past experiences, and that violence is one reason why many women choose to leave a relationship, this higher figure would also reflect previous experiences of violence against their mothers by fathers, before or following separation (National Crime Prevention 2001).

### **Children and young people are also victims of direct violence by adults.**

Physical and sexual violence against children is common, and is more common in households where there is violence against mothers or step-mothers:

- One study found that physical violence against children is 15 times as likely in families where domestic violence is occurring (McKay 1994)
- A review of several studies found that child abuse and domestic violence co-occurred in between 30 and 60 per cent of cases (Edleson 1999).

*I'm nervous all the time.*  
(Bursting the Bubble)

Some of the variation in the co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence may relate to the severity of the domestic violence. One study, for instance, found that in cases when the violence against the mother or step-mother was rated at the most severe end of the scale, almost 100 per cent of children in these homes were also physically assaulted by the same man (Humphreys and Houghton 2008).

The National Crime Prevention survey (2001) found that:

- Up to one in ten young people report living in households where the male carer has hit them and/or their siblings for reasons 'other than bad behaviour'.
- Well over half (55.3%) of these young people also report domestic violence occurring in the same household, more than double the rate for the sample as a whole (23.4%).

The extent to which physical and sexual violence against children and young people co-occur is under-researched, but one study of sexually abused children found that 40 per cent were also living with domestic violence (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). Tomison (2000) theorises that the overt expression of male power represented by domestic violence creates a climate of coercion in which sexual abuse thrives. He cites Goddard and Hillier (1993: 27) who point out that "children having witnessed the beating of their mothers need no further reminder of the possible consequences of their resistance to the wishes of their fathers (or, indeed, of older males in general)."

Only a minority of violent incidents against children and young people (like incidents of domestic violence) are reported to authorities. Nevertheless:

<sup>7</sup> SNAICC provides a range of strategies and materials for supporting Aboriginal and Islander children and young people experiencing domestic/family violence, in ways which value the resilience and knowledge of Aboriginal and Islander people (SNAICC 2005a).



- There were 266,745 notifications of child abuse reported to the government child protection services in Australia in 2005-6 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2007).
- Reporting levels seem to be increasing, with the number of child protection notifications in Australia almost doubling over the last five years (from 137,938 in 2001-02 to 266,745 in 2005-06).

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare notes that some of this increase could reflect changes in child protection policies and practices as well as increased public awareness of child abuse.

## The impacts of domestic violence by adults on children and young people

Significant research has been undertaken on the impact that violence has on individual women, and consequently on society as a whole. For instance, it is known that violence against women contributes more to ill-health, disability and death in women aged 15-44 than any other risk factor, including smoking and obesity (VicHealth 2004). It results not only in immediate physical injury, but also in long-term mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. This is examined in more detail in Part Two.

The knowledge base on the impact of domestic violence on children and young people is less advanced, but growing. Large-scale literature reviews have collated the established risks of domestic violence to the well-being of children and young people in Australia (Laing 2001) and internationally (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). Research has shown similar impacts to that on women in terms of mental health and economic costs. The research is strongest with regards to the effect that the experience of domestic violence has on children's and young people's behavioural and emotional functioning. But there is also emerging research showing the negative impact of the experience of violence on young people's school work and later employment levels. Of widespread concern is the impact the experience of violence may have on children's and young people's own personal relationships, whether at school or with friends, or in terms of intimate relationships later in life.

Studies of the impact of direct violence on children,

while not specific to the experience of domestic violence, have found long-term adverse outcomes in terms of intellectual and cognitive functioning (Perez and Widom 1994) and mental health problems including depression (Keatsdale 2003). Similarly, the long-term consequences of child sexual assault include depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, eating disorders, use of amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy (Swanston *et al.* 2003) and a thirteen-fold increased risk of suicide (Plunkett, *et al.* 2001). Child sexual assault is also associated with high adult rates of post-traumatic stress and dissociation disorders (Keatsdale 2003).

The fact that direct violence against children and young people often co-occurs in households where there is domestic violence makes it difficult to distinguish between the impact of the two intersecting forms of violence. Factors such as children's age and the severity of the violence seem to have a greater effect on their outcomes than whether the violence was witnessed or directly experienced (Humphreys and Houghton 2008).

### Domestic violence results in direct and indirect physical harm to children and young people.

As outlined above, direct physical violence against children is more likely in homes where domestic violence is occurring. In addition to this, however, direct physical harm may also result from violence where the main target is the mother (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). For example:

- Young children may be in their mother's arms when she is assaulted.
- One third of children and young people living in homes where there is domestic violence are hit by their father or step-father when trying to defend their mother/ or step-mother or stop the violence.
- Children may be used as hostages by perpetrators in an attempt to control their partners' behaviour or force them to return to the relationship, and are at risk of physical harm (including death) in such cases.

*I get between them and try to stop mum getting hurt.*  
(Bursting the Bubble)

In the long term, given the 'negative chain effects' of adverse childhood experiences (see below), a link can be drawn between experience of domestic violence and later health problems, including heart disease, liver disease, cancer and chronic lung disease (Felitti *et al.* 1998).

*I get depressed like I can't be bothered with anything.*

((Bursting the Bubble))

### **Domestic violence has a clear and negative impact on children's and young people's behavioural, cognitive and emotional functioning.**

Children and young people experiencing domestic violence are more likely to experience behavioural and emotional problems compared with other children (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). While such outcomes are by no means inevitable, and while it is important not to pathologise children and young people who have experienced domestic violence, the research highlights a clear correlation. For instance:

- Children and young people who experience domestic violence are at heightened risk of alcohol and drug abuse and delinquency in later life (Carrington and Phillips 2006).
- There is some evidence indicating a connection between experience of domestic violence and youth suicide, especially in young men (Northern Territory Government Domestic Violence Strategy 1998).

- Children living with domestic violence have much higher rates of depression, anxiety and behavioural problems than children and young people not living with these issues (Humphreys and Houghton 2008).
- Some studies show that children living with domestic violence have higher rates of cognitive problems than children and young people not living with these issues (Humphreys 2000).

The age and developmental stage of the child or young person can affect how these problems may manifest:

- Infants and young children exposed to domestic violence are more likely to have high levels of ill health, poor sleeping habits, excessive crying and screaming, disrupted attachment patterns (Humphreys and Houghton 2008), severe shyness and diminished self-esteem, aggressive behaviour, emotional distress, anxiety and depression (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2003a).
- Children of pre-school age are particularly vulnerable to blaming themselves for adult anger, and tend to show the most behavioural disturbance (Humphreys and Houghton 2008).
- Young people living with, or who have experienced, domestic violence may show fear and trauma symptoms akin to post-traumatic stress disorder (Ray 1994). Higher levels of depression (especially in girls), and adjustment difficulties such as cognitive problems and aggression are also evident (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2003a).
- Young people are more likely to show the effects of such disruption in their school and social environments (Mullender *et al.* 2002).

*I have nightmares and can't sleep.*

((Bursting the Bubble))

*I hang out at the train station heaps. Sometimes it's better than being at home.*  
(Bursting the Bubble)

### **Domestic violence affects children and young people's social development.**

The emotional, behavioural and cognitive impacts of living with violence outlined above can have a cumulative impact on children and young people, by affecting the way they go through their social and personal 'developmental tasks' (Humphreys and Houghton 2008). Children and young people living with domestic violence have been shown to be at a higher risk of impaired social development in some studies (Humphreys 2000).

These impacts can flow on to other people in relationships with children or young people who are living with violence. For example, the young people interviewed for the *Bursting the Bubble* project<sup>8</sup> (Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre 2003) noted how the violence affected their relationships with their family members and other people, such as:

- Erosion of trust, for family members and other people.
- Avoiding going home or being around family as much as possible.
- In some cases, subjecting others to bullying or aggression (Carrington and Phillips 2006).
- Feeling responsible for looking after family members or trying to protect them, or trying to be quiet and keep the peace to avoid 'upsetting anyone'.

### **Children's and young people's education and later employment prospects are harmed by domestic violence.**

Children's and young people's experiences of violence can predispose them to further negative experiences through the process of 'negative chain effects' (Frederick and Goddard 2007). International longitudinal studies show that early 'psychosocial risk experiences' (such as violence) affect the ability of children and young people to function effectively, including at school and later in the labour market, increasing the likelihood of problems in adolescence and adulthood (Frederick and Goddard 2007). Such problems include:

- educational difficulties,
- teenage pregnancy,
- unemployment,
- limited social support, and
- relationship breakdown.

*I went from a straight 'A' student to failing every class because I was concentrating on what was going on at home.*  
(L, 16 year-old young woman, in Houghton 2008: 65)

Australian research (Northern Territory Government Domestic Violence Strategy 1998) has similarly found that young people who have experienced domestic violence are at risk of:

- not completing secondary school,
- unemployment, and
- performing inadequately in the work force.

*I just want to tune out and forget it. Sometimes I get pissed or stoned, but that only blocks it out for a while.*  
(Bursting the Bubble)

<sup>8</sup>*Bursting the Bubble* is a website designed by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre of Victoria (DVRCV), for children and young people living in homes where there is violence or abuse ([www.burstingthebubble.com](http://www.burstingthebubble.com)). The research phase for the website's development included extensive interviews with children and young people about their experiences of violence, which provided this qualitative data (McKenzie 2003). An evaluation of the project is also available on DVRCV's website: <http://www.dvrcv.org.au/PublicationsHub/evaluationbubble.htm>

Another Australian study (Seth-Purdie 2000) noted how the negative effects of child abuse and exposure to domestic violence on physical and mental health could in turn compound:

- pathways into poverty,
- 'accumulated adversity,' and
- increased risk of welfare receipt.

### **There is a high economic cost to the violence experienced by children and young people.**

The cost of domestic violence to the economy (e.g. in terms of ill-health and lost productivity) was estimated at \$8.1 billion for the year 2002-3 (Access Economics 2004). The same study estimated that the specific health costs for children who are 'bystanders' to such violence was \$17 million. However, there are no Australian studies to date which consider the *overall* cost borne by children and young people who live or have lived with domestic violence (for example, in reduced productivity, unemployment and welfare receipt).

A study commissioned by the Kids First Foundation into the costs of direct physical and sexual violence against children in Australia (Keatsdale 2003) took into account:

- the human cost of those abused (for example, medical costs, psychological trauma, educational support and pain and suffering),
- the long-term human and social costs (such as mental disability, increased medical service usage, chronic health problems, lost productivity, juvenile delinquency, adult criminality, homelessness, substance abuse),
- the cost of public intervention (including child protection services, law enforcement, treatment of perpetrators and victim support), and
- the cost of community contributions (such as voluntary and charitable services and out-of-home care).

The total annual cost of 'child abuse and neglect' was calculated at \$4.93 billion for the financial year 2001-02. Approximately three-quarters of this reflected the long-term human cost and the cost of public intervention (Keatsdale 2003).

### **Living with domestic violence can shape young people's attitudes to violence in positive or negative directions.**

*I get angry at everyone.*  
(Bursting the Bubble)

There is evidence to suggest that witnessing domestic violence against their mothers may shape young people's attitudes to violence in their own intimate relationships. The National Crime Prevention study found that exposure to domestic violence "appeared to influence young people's attitudes, either making them more accepting of domestic violence or highly intolerant of such violence, having experienced its damaging effects" (National Crime Prevention 2001: 2).

*It just gets me so muddled up. I'm frightened I'll be like it when I grow up.*  
(8 year-old boy in Houghton 2008: 46, citing Mullender et al. 2002)

A large-scale community attitudes survey by VicHealth confirmed this finding, with two clear 'attitudinal categories' emerging among adults who had experienced or witnessed domestic violence as children: those who, consistent with 'cycle of violence' theories, were significantly *more* tolerant than average of violence in intimate relationships, and a second category who were significantly *less* so than the average (VicHealth 2006).

### **Young men who have experienced domestic violence are more likely to perpetrate violence in their own relationships, although the majority do not.**

Much has been written about 'intergenerational transmission' of violence, the so-called 'cycle of violence', and there is data to support a higher risk of violence perpetration (and to a lesser extent, victimisation) among those adults who witnessed or experienced violence as children. The National Crime Prevention

survey found that the best predictor of young men's perpetration of violence in their own relationships was 'witnessing' domestic violence in the home (National Crime Prevention 2001). Other research has found that children, and especially boys, who either live with domestic violence against their mothers/step-mothers, or are subjected to violence themselves, are more likely as adults to have violence-supportive attitudes and to perpetrate violence (Flood and Pease 2006). Schumacher *et al.*'s (2001) review also confirms the influence of witnessing parental violence in the family of origin, and notes some studies suggesting that witnessing *any* adult violence against *any* victim is associated with later perpetration of domestic violence.

While there is a clear association between the experience of domestic violence in childhood (and/or direct violence against children or young people) and later perpetration, there is no evidence of a *causal* relationship (Mullender 1996). That is, "we are talking about increased probability, not fate" (Indermaur 2000: 5):

- Prior exposure to domestic violence is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for the future perpetration of violence.
- Significant proportions of men who use violence against their wives or partners have neither witnessed nor experienced physical aggression as children (Lichter and McCloskey 2004).
- Some studies find no link between childhood victimisation and adult perpetration of violence (Sellers *et al.* 2005).
- The association between witnessing and perpetrating is "complex and mediated by a number of social and situational factors" (Indermaur 2000: 5).
- Domestic violence among adults is in part learnt through children's (and especially boys') experience of family life, but also their experience of wider contexts and communities (Flood and Pease 2006).

In order to explain why many young men who have experienced domestic violence *do not* go on to perpetrate it, and why many young men who have *not* experienced domestic violence in childhood *do* go on to perpetrate it, we have to look more broadly than individual and relational factors. Critical social theories, for example, point to the 'normalisation' of violence and aggression in the way certain forms of masculinity are socially constructed (Connell 1987; Mills 2001). Violence is, then, "a problem associated with certain masculinities, which boys/men take up, rather than [a problem] with men, and there are other alternative non-violent ways of 'doing boy/man' which can be taken up" (Ellis 2008: 125). Aggressive constructions of masculinity and other causes of violence situated in gender relations, social norms and practices, and access to resources and systems of support, are examined in Part Three.

*I started losing respect for him gradually. As I say I've got absolutely no respect for him now. Cause he's not worthy of any respect.*

(14 year-old young man on his violent father, in Houghton 2008: 37, citing Irwin *et al.* 2002)



## Part Two: Dating and relationship violence among young people

We turn now to violence used and experienced by young people in their own dating relationships. How common is violence in young people's intimate and sexual relations, what are the typical dynamics of this violence, and what is its impact?

### Dating and relationship violence among young people: The extent of victimisation and perpetration

#### Young women face particularly high risks of violence.

Young women face particularly high risks of violence. Young women are at greater risk of violence than older women. Australian data shows that:

- 12 per cent of women aged 18–24 years experienced at least one incident of violence in the last 12 months, compared to 6.5 per cent of women aged 35–44 years and 1.7 per cent of women aged 55 years and over (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006: 6). (These figures include violence in the context of intimate relationships and violence elsewhere, including violence by family members, strangers, and others.)
- Among young women aged 18–23 (in the *Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health*), 12 percent report that they have been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse (Young *et al.* 2000: 1).

International data show a similar pattern, documenting that large proportions of girls and young women are subjected to physical and sexual violence in the context of sexual and social relationships.<sup>9</sup>

#### While physical aggression by both males and females is relatively common in young people's relationships, young women are more likely to be physically injured and to be scared.

Using a measure which counts 'violent acts', an Australian survey of 5,000 young people aged 12–20 found that overall levels of victimisation in dating relationships are similar among males and females. About one-third of all boys and girls who have been in a dating relationship have experienced some measure of physical violence in one or more of those relationships.

However, this same survey also documents strong contrasts in females' and males' use and experiences of violence. Females were more likely to slap, whereas males were more likely to put down or humiliate, try to control the victim physically and to throw, smash, hit or kick something. Of all the young people who had experienced threats of, or actual, physical violence:

*My boyfriend and I have a good relationship. He treats me well. One [boyfriend] didn't. I couldn't see he was a bastard until it got to him hitting me. My friends, well they tried to tell me but I thought, 'What do you know?' So after the hitting kept going I got out, my friends helped but I felt really embarrassed about what had happened. Now I know it's his shit to deal with and I don't care who knows he's a bastard.*  
(Xenia, 16, in Chung 2007: 1285).

- 25 per cent of girls and 6 per cent of boys had been frightened by the physical aggression they experienced;
- 24 per cent of girls and 5 per cent of boys had been both frightened and hurt (National Crime Prevention 2001: 122–123).

#### Girls and young women suffer more, they are more afraid, and they experience much more sexual violence than boys and young men.

US studies find a similar pattern. While male and female adolescents report being victims of physical violence in relationships, girls and young women suffer more and are more afraid. As the National Youth Prevention Resource Centre<sup>10</sup> summarises:

Many relationships involve mutual abuse, with both partners using violence against the other. However, it is clear that male and female adolescents use physical force for different reasons and with different results (O'Keefe 1997). Researchers have found that female youth suffer more from relationship violence, emotionally and physically (Foshee 1996). They are much more likely than males to have serious injuries and to report being terrified. In contrast, male victims seldom seem to fear violence by their dates or girlfriends, often saying that the attacks did not hurt and that they found the violence amusing (Molidor and Tolman 1998).

<sup>9</sup> See these two fact sheets for compilations of US statistics: <http://endabuse.org/resources/facts/Teenagers.pdf>; <http://www.ncadv.org/files/datingviolence.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Youth Dating Violence - Information and Resources, URL: <http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/faq/prevdateviol.asp#7>, Accessed 18 September 2008.

*One time at school I slammed her against a locker. I choked her until she was red. She was making me look stupid with lies and shit. . . . Last year I shoved a girl into a snow bank. There was a big block of ice in it. I rammed her in. I wanted to hurt her ...*  
(Steve, 15, in Totten 2003: 77)

Girls and young women subjected to violence in relationships report significantly more emotional hurt and fear than boys and young men (Foshee 1996; O'Keefe and Treister 1998). For example, in a survey of 635 high-school students, the majority of boys (56%) were not hurt at all by the worst reported incident of dating violence, but only 9 per cent of girls reported being unhurt and nearly half (48%) reported being hurt "a lot" (Molidor and Tolman 1998).

### **Girls and young women face high risks of sexual violence.**

As other research among younger females also shows, girls and young women in Australia face high risks of sexual violence:

*Yeah, and there were quite a few times that he forced me. All of a sudden he was sort of ... it's like he went into, like he blacked out or something, he would become very aggressive. 'Cause I'd be crying and saying 'I don't wanna. Get off' I think in a way he mistook my actions, like I'd go to him for a cuddle, and that's all I wanted, but he got the wrong impression. And at the end of the day it's wrong for him to do that and I know it's wrong and still don't forgive him for that.*  
(Rose, in Hird and Jackson 2001: 37)

- One in seven girls and young women aged 12 to 20 (14 per cent) have experienced rape or sexual assault (National Crime Prevention 2001: 115).
- Among girls who have ever had sex, 30.2 per cent of Year 10 girls and 26.6 per cent of Year 12 girls have ever experienced unwanted sex (Smith *et al.* 2003).

The National Crime Prevention survey found that 14 per cent of young women said a boyfriend had tried to force them to have sex, and six per cent said a boyfriend had physically forced them to have sex. One-third (33 per cent) of young women knew someone who experienced rape or sexual assault (National Crime Prevention 2001: 115).

*He would hassle me all the time and tell me that if I really loved him I'd have sex with him and that would be the ultimate show of how much we loved each other. I told him that I just didn't feel ready. He just kept going on about how if I didn't show him I loved him by having sex then he couldn't go out with me any more. And he kept saying all his mates sleep with their girlfriends. One night I just gave in and let him do it, because I felt guilty like there was something wrong with me for not wanting to. A few weeks later he dumped me anyway.*  
(Kylie, in Domestic Violence Resource Centre of Victoria 2001)

The contrast between young women's and young men's experiences of relationship or intimate partner violence is even starker when we focus on sexual violence. Here, there are dramatic gender differences. US data finds that females sustain significantly more sexual victimisation than males (Foshee 1996; Molidor and Tolman 1998). Similarly, the National Crime Prevention survey found that three per cent of males said a partner had tried to force them to have sex (compared to 14 per cent among females) (National Crime Prevention 2001: 115).

### **Girls and young women face high risks of sexual harassment.**

Girls and young women are also disproportionately subject to sexual harassment. While Australian data is limited, a range of US studies find that girls experience higher frequencies of sexual harassment than boys, and males perpetrate more than twice as much sexual harassment as females (Fineran and Bolen 2006: 1171).

## Typical dynamics of dating and relationship violence

**A man using physical violence against his girlfriend or wife typically also uses a range of other abusive, controlling, and harmful behaviours.**

In the situation where a man is using physical violence against his wife or girlfriend, typically his physical aggression is accompanied by a wide range of other abusive, controlling, and harmful behaviours. He threatens his partner with the use of violence against her or their children, sexually assaults her, and intimidates her with frightening gestures, destruction of property, and showing weapons. He uses coercion and threats, including direct threats to his partner or her family, suicide threats, threatening to expose embarrassing secrets or manipulating her to engage in illegal or embarrassing acts. He isolates her and monitors her behaviour, which increases his control, increases her emotional dependence on him, and makes it easier to perpetrate and hide physical abuse. He practises insults, mind-games, and emotional manipulation such that the woman's self-esteem is undermined and she feels she has no other options outside the relationship. He tells her that she is worthless *and* that he loves her. Finally, he minimizes and denies the extent of his violent behaviour, refuses to accept responsibility for his actions, and blames the woman for the abuse (Gamache 1990, 74-79). Such efforts, while certainly not always successful, make it more likely that the girl or woman will follow his rules and even act against her own best interests.

*In the beginning of our relationship, Adam\* and I barely fought, but as time passed, everything changed. Anytime we argued, he'd yell at me and tell me I was a 'worthless piece of shit' and a 'waste of his time.' He became incredibly possessive. On one occasion, when he saw me talking to another guy during lunch, he called me a 'dirty slut'... in front of the entire cafeteria. It was humiliating and degrading, but he never got physical, so I didn't think it was any big deal.*  
(Mary, 17, in Answer 2008)

As we argued in more detail in the note on language at the beginning of this report, 'domestic violence' can best be understood as a systematic pattern of power and control exerted by one person (usually a man) against

another person (often a woman), involving a variety of physical and non-physical tactics of abuse and coercion. The "Power and Control Wheel" below is a depiction of the many tactics or strategies of power and control typically used by a man using violence against his partner, here focused on violence in teenage relationships in particular. Below it, the "Equality Wheel" is a depiction of the inverse, of teenage relationships based on equality.

Figure 1: Power and Control Wheel



Figure 2: Equality wheel



## The impact of dating and relationship violence: On women in general

Girls and young women, like women in general, experience a wide range of negative impacts from violence in their intimate and social relationships. We first document these impacts among women in general, before focusing on impacts among girls and young women in particular.

### Intimate partner violence has a profound impact on women's health and well-being.

*Sometimes I feel like I want to hurt myself.*  
(Bursting the Bubble))

Intimate partner violence has a profound impact on women's health and well-being. Globally, violence against women has been identified as a leading issue of public health (WHO 2002). In Australia as elsewhere, intimate partner violence makes a significant contribution to poor health and illness among women. In fact, recent research documents that intimate partner violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 (VicHealth 2004).

A summary of research compiled by VicHealth documents the health impacts of violence against women:

- Women who have been exposed to violence have a greater risk of developing a range of health problems, including stress, anxiety, depression, pain syndromes, phobias and somatic and medical symptoms.
- Women who have been exposed to violence report poorer physical health overall, are more likely to engage in practices that are harmful to their health (such as alcohol and drug abuse), and experience difficulties in accessing health services.
- The psychological consequences of violence against women can be as grave as the physical effects. Depression is one of the most common consequences of sexual and physical violence

against women. Women who suffer from violence are also at a higher risk of stress and anxiety disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

Intimate partner violence has further impacts on women's sexual and reproductive health, including negative impacts on pregnancy:

- Violence poses serious health risks to pregnant women (including breast and genital injury, miscarriage, induced abortion, late trimester bleeding and infection, blunt or penetrating abdominal trauma, and death) and infants (including foetal fractures, low birth weight, injury, suppressed immune defence system, and more) (Walsh 2008).

### Domestic violence has negative impacts on every domain of women's lives, including their parenting.

*The children witnessed verbal abuse...Ivan was quite controlling and there could've been physical violence because there had been a couple of times in the past...I learnt to shut down and not talk back and not stand up for my rights. I was thinking in order to save the peace to not fight in front of the children. But the children, they witnessed a lot of disrespect towards me. I would get ignored, my opinions would be put down, any authority of mine would be undermined.*

(Donna, in Howard & Rottam 2008: 35)

Further research finds that domestic violence has a long-term impact on its victims and survivors, including on:

- Their income and financial stability;
- Housing security;
- Parenting;
- Their children's safety during contact with abusive ex-partners (Evans 2007).

*[There was] manipulation or control, verbal intimidation [from my ex-partner in front of my son] mostly like I was 'Mum going on again' or 'Whatever mum says isn't important,' rolling of the eyes, 'She's talking shit again. [...]' The kids tell me even now, you know... 'You're full of crap' or 'Everything you say is full of crap.'*

(Donna, in Howard & Rottam 2008: 28)



## The negative impact of violence on health is long-lasting and cumulative.

There is also evidence to suggest that:

- The influence of violence can persist long after the abuse has stopped;
- The more serious the abuse, the greater its impact on women's physical and mental health;
- The impact over time of different types and multiple episodes of abuse is cumulative.

## Violence against women can be fatal.

Finally, men's violence against women can be fatal:

- Intimate partner homicides account for one-fifth of all homicides in Australia. Four out of five involve a man killing his female partner.
- In 2005-06, 59 women were killed by their male partners or ex-partners (Davies and Mouzos 2007).

## The impact of dating and relationship violence: On girls and young women in particular

Girls and young women experience many of the same negative effects of violence as their older counterparts. However, they also suffer distinctive impacts associated with their age and development.

### Dating and relationship violence has a profound impact on girls' and young women's health and well-being.

*We spent all our time together. It was wonderful at first, but it became obsessive. I was either with him or talking to him on the phone. He became more and more jealous. At one point, I even had to be on the phone with him when I went to sleep so that he knew I was at home at night. I was allowed to talk to only two people at school--both were girls, and he had his friends watch me to make sure I was obedient.*

(Anonymous, 13, in ATVP 2008)

A US national survey of over 6,700 girls and boys found that girls who have suffered abuse or violence (including by family members, boyfriends, and others) are more likely:

- To show symptoms of depression and low self-esteem;
- To suffer episodic or chronic depression, posttraumatic stress syndrome, and other mental health disorders;
- In the long term, to experience continued or chronic health problems, increased use of medical services and hospitalisations, and poor self-rated health status (Schoen *et al.* 1997).

Female adolescents experiencing violence:

- Are more likely to smoke and use other substances;
- Are at increased risk for pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, suicide attempts, and unhealthy weight loss (Johnson *et al.* 1999).

Recent, nationally representative surveys of adolescent girls in the US find that:

- Girls who reported abuse from dating partners have been found to be at significantly elevated risk for a broad range of serious health concerns, including being more likely to:
  - Use alcohol, tobacco, and cocaine;
  - Engage in unhealthy weight control;
  - Engage in sexual health risk behaviour, including first intercourse before the age of 15 years and multiple partnering;
  - Have been pregnant;
  - Seriously consider or attempt suicide (Silverman 2001).
- Girls who were intentionally physically hurt by a date in the previous year are more likely than other girls to experience sexual health risks, including increasing vulnerability to HIV infection and other sexually transmitted infections, and to have been pregnant (Silverman *et al.* 2004).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Also see recent studies by Banyard and Cross (2008) and Ackard and Neumark-Sztainer (2002).



**When young women experience physical violence in relationships, this violence is often serious and damaging.**

*The first time it happened, I was about fourteen and my boyfriend was sixteen. He saw me hug my brother in the hall at school, but he didn't know it was my brother because we'd just started dating. He dragged me out of school, behind a store and just beat me up – literally. He said if anyone asked me what happened, to tell them I got into a fight with someone; not to dare tell anyone he hit me. (Anonymous, 17, in ATVP 2008)*

In the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health, young women aged 18–23 who had been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse were further surveyed. Of those who reported physical violence, half had been subject to 'serious violence,' including being beaten, choked, or attempted shooting. Seven per cent had been shot or stabbed by a partner. Three-quarters had been slapped, kicked, hit with a fist or with something else that could hurt them (Young *et al.* 2000: 2).

#### **This impact is long-term.**

As is the case among older women, girls and young women who suffer dating violence experience long-term impacts. For example, a longitudinal comparison over five years of adolescents who had experienced dating violence and adolescents who had not found that adolescent dating violence was associated with a greater likelihood of problematic health behaviours and psychological impairment. For example, dating violence was associated with tobacco smoking, marijuana use, and high depressive symptoms, and suicide attempts (Ackard, Eisenberg and Neumark-Sztainer 2007).

**Intimate partner violence harms the sexual and reproductive health of young women who are pregnant or parenting.**

Like older women, girls and young women who are pregnant or parents also experience intimate partner violence. For example, in a US of 724 young mothers between the ages of 12-18, one out of every eight pregnant girls and young women reported having been physically assaulted by the father of her baby during the preceding 12 months (Wiemann *et al.* 2000). Australian research finds that:

- Young women exposed to violence are more likely to have a miscarriage, stillbirth, premature birth or abortion than other young women (Taft, Watson and Lee 2004).

*He grabbed my arm and twisted it all the way and broke my bone up here so I walked. I got home and my arm was all black and I had a big lump and my mum took me to the hospital and then the police went there. He got arrested. Got charged with assault. I had to get an intervention order on him 'cause he got people to follow me. Kept on ringing me up and saying that he was going to kill me so he got done for it. (Jane, 16, in Chung 2007: 1285).*

**Intimate partner violence against women often involves injuries.**

As Australian surveys have found, when young women experience physical violence in relationships, this violence is often serious and damaging. Among young women aged 18–23 who had been in a violent relationship with a partner or spouse, close to three-quarters had sustained injuries (Young *et al.* 2000: 3). About a quarter saw a doctor or nurse for their injuries. Sixteen per cent were seriously injured: they had broken bones, burns, broken teeth, or had suffered miscarriages. Some suffered repeated injuries: for example, 40 per cent of women whose bones had been broken had repeated breaks.

## **Girls and young women are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment in schools.**

Girls and young women are also disproportionately affected by sexual harassment in schools. US research documents that while large proportions of both girls and boys experience harassment in schools, girls are more likely to report being negatively affected by it.

- Girls are far more likely than boys to feel 'self conscious' (44% to 19%), 'embarrassed' (53% to 32%), and 'less confident' (32% to 16%) because of an incident of harassment.
- Girls are more likely than boys to change behaviours in school and at home because of the experience, including not talking as much in class (30% to 18%) and avoiding the person who harassed them (56% to 24%) (AAUW 2001).

## Part Three: The causes of violence against girls and young women

Why does men's violence against women occur? What factors shape domestic violence and sexual assault? Why does dating and relationship violence among young people occur? Why are some boys and young men more likely than others to use violence against girls and women? And why are risks of victimisation higher among some groups than others?

In this section, we summarise what is known about the causes of violence against girls and women. We draw on scholarship both on intimate partner violence among adults and on violence in young people's relationships and other social and sexual relations.<sup>12</sup>

The causes of violence against girls and women can be grouped into three broad clusters: (1) gender roles and relations; (2) social norms and practices relating to violence; and (3) access to resources and systems of support.

### Gender roles and relations

The most well-documented determinants of violence against girls and women can be found in gender norms and gender relations. Gender norms refer to the meanings given to being male and female in any particular context or community, while gender relations refer to the organisation and patterning of males' and females' lives and relations.

Whether at individual, community, or societal levels, there are relationships between how gender is organised and violence against women. One key factor here is men's gender-role attitudes and beliefs, while another is male dominance in families and relationships. We address attitudes first. Men's agreement with sexist, patriarchal, or sexually hostile attitudes is an important predictor of their use of violence against women. Men who do not hold patriarchal and hostile gender norms are less likely than other men to use violence against an intimate partner (Flood and Pease 2006).

#### **Boys and young men have worse attitudes than girls and young women towards intimate partner violence.**

There is a gender gap in attitudes towards intimate partner violence. The National Crime Prevention survey found that 14 per cent of young males, but only 3 per cent of females, agreed with the statement, 'It's okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on.' Males are more likely than

females to agree with statements condoning violence such 'most physical violence occurs because a partner provoked it' (32%, versus 24% for females) and 'when a girl hits a guy it's really not a big deal' (31%, versus 19% for females) (National Crime Prevention 2001).

This same national study finds that young males are less likely than young females to consider particular behaviours to be domestic violence, more likely to see them as normal conflict, less likely to rate a range of forms of violence as very serious, and more likely to agree with statements which condone violence. Findings are similar in a series of smaller Australian studies (Davis and Lee 1996; Golding and Friedman 1997; Xenos and Smith 2001).

#### **Among young people, attitudes are worst among younger males.**

*If he sees someone on TV or even girls in the street he might go ... 'sluts'; he'll say 'sluts.'*  
(Kate, on her 13 year-old son's attitudes to women, Howard & Rottam 2008: 67)

Among children and young people, it is younger males who show the worst attitudes. In the survey of 12-20 year-olds above, boys aged 12 to 14 showed higher support for violence-supportive attitudes than older males (National Crime Prevention 2001: 75-95). Other Australian studies report similar results. In a Melbourne study for example, secondary school students had poorer attitudes towards rape victims and towards women than university students (Xenos and Smith 2001). Various international studies find similar patterns (Anderson *et al.* 2004: 85-86; Aromaki *et al.* 2002; Hutchinson *et al.* 1994: 417).

*He would try and intimidate them [female teachers] more than if he had a male teacher. Gender issues [meaning disrespect] towards women...by the time he was in about grades four and five...He had little respect and didn't see them as equals.*  
(Patricia, on her son, Howard & Rottam 2008: 67)

<sup>12</sup>This is a summary of a longer paper prepared by Michael Flood as a background document for VicHealth's framework for the primary prevention of violence against women. This document is available on request from the author.

There are at least three explanations of this pattern. First, younger boys' greater endorsement of violence against women may reflect their lack of exposure to the liberalising influence of late secondary school and university education experienced by older males. Second, it may reflect developmental shifts in attitudes and in other qualities such as empathy, sensitivity, and moral awareness (Davis and Lee 1996: 799; Hutchinson *et al.* 1994: 417). Third, the poor attitudes of younger males in particular may reflect distinct characteristics of boys' peer cultures. Among boys, both gender segregation and homophobia peak in early adolescence. The school and peer cultures of boys' early teens are marked by an intense gendered policing of boys' lives and relations (Flood 2002) and saturated with homophobic references and accusations (Plummer 1999: 67-68). In this context, boys may be particularly prone to expressing views tolerant of violence against (girls and) women.

Both gender segregation and homophobia decline in the late school years and after school, as boys invest more in social and sexual relations with girls, they are less influenced by school peer groups, and they achieve more stable gender and sexual identities.

However, this does not mean that boys' violence-supportive attitudes simply disappear as they age. Young men continue to be much more tolerant than young women of physical and sexual violence against women, with the gender gap persisting across age groups.

### **At the same time, a majority of young men believe that violence against women is unacceptable.**

Nevertheless, the majority of young men, like most young women, see violence in relationships as unacceptable. While young men are less unanimous that violence in intimate and dating relationships is intolerable, most men reject explicit violence-supportive notions. For example, 74 per cent of males aged 12 to 20 disagree with the idea that 'It's okay for a boy to make a girl have sex with him if she has flirted with him or led him on, 70 per cent disagree that 'It is okay to put pressure on a girl to have sex but not to physically force her,' and 74 per cent disagree that 'Men are unable to control their temper.' On the other hand, only 43 per cent disagreed that 'most physical violence occurs in dating because a partner provoked it,' while 17 per cent did not know (National Crime Prevention 2001: 62-64).

However, while young men and women are prepared to reject explicitly violence-supportive statements, they also may support violence in more subtle and complex ways, particularly through social norms regarding gender and sexuality, as we discuss below.

### **Males are more likely to accept violence against females if they have traditional gender-role attitudes.**

The gender gap in attitudes towards violence against women is shaped by attitudes towards gender. Traditional gender-role attitudes, whether held by women or men, are associated with greater acceptance of violence against women, while egalitarian attitudes are associated with less acceptance of violence.

*It's all about knowing your place in society. . . . It really pisses me off when I see a girl who pretends that she doesn't have to be in her place. I feel like I have to teach her a lesson. How the fuck are girls ever gonna know that their job is to take care of shit at home—cooking, cleaning, the kids—if we don't tell them? I mean, it's me who's supposed to be making the big bucks to support my family. Where the fuck do girls get off thinking that they can do it too? . . . I've never agreed with hitting a girl and I never will. . . . I think I'm doing them a favor. The bottom line is that men are more important. . . . I've got my place in the world and I know women do too.*

(Steve, 15, in Totten 2003: 78)

Among 12 to 20 year-olds, those young people who show the strongest tolerance for violence in intimate relationships (by either sex) also are significantly more likely than other young people to hold traditional views about gender roles (National Crime Prevention 2001: 89-90).

### **Violence is invisible and 'normal' among young people.**

Violence-supportive attitudes are grounded in wider social norms regarding gender and sexuality. In fact, in many ways, violence is part of 'normal' sexual, intimate, and family relations. This is clear from studies among young people (and adults).

For many young people, sexual harassment is pervasive, male aggression is expected and normalised, there is constant pressure among boys to behave in sexually aggressive ways, girls are routinely objectified, a sexual double standard polices girls' sexual and intimate involvements, and girls are compelled to accommodate male 'needs' and desires (Hird and Jackson 2001; Tolman *et al.* 2003).

*I've had friends that have had problems, more mental than physical. Like the guy will try and brainwash her, make her think she's not going to be anything without him, or if he's not in her life she won't have anybody. He won't let think about any other person, she can't talk to or barley look at other guys or he'll get mad. Manipulating. I've tried to talk to my friend about this situation. She would say it's not a big deal, but she'd say 'We were fighting, messing around' and she'd show me the bruises.*

Kati, 15 year-old young woman in National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline 2008)

### **Male-dominated dating relationships are a key risk factor for violence.**

Gender roles and relations also shape intimate partner violence at the level of relationships and families. A key factor here is the power relations between partners – are they egalitarian, or dominated by one partner? Gendered inequalities of power are a risk factor in girls' and young women's sexual and romantic involvements. Studies find that male dominance of decision-making in 'dates', females' perceptions of male control, and age disparities involving older male partners all are associated with greater risks of physical and sexual victimisation (Vezina and Herbert 2007).

*I guess a man's gotta be tough. He's gotta take care of himself and look out for his family. If a man can't do that, he's nothin'. As long as a man's got a wife and kids who respect him, do as he says, and he's tough enough to stand up for himself, he can get by without the rest.*

(Colin, 16, in Totten 2003: 81)

Another factor is conflict, which interacts with the power relations of the relationship or family. When conflict occurs in an asymmetrical power structure, there is a much higher risk of violence.

### **Sexist peer cultures are a key risk factor for violence.**

*There is a lot of pressure on me to start making crude comments when women walk past. I think the thing that makes men leer at women (etc) is whether they are with their mates or not. I mean, if a man was walking on his own and he passed a nice-looking woman he wouldn't say [anything]. He would if he was with his mates.*

(15 year-old young man in Phillips 1993: 233)

Peer groups and organisational cultures are important influences too. Some men have rape-supporting social relationships, as it is known from studies in sport, male residential colleges on campuses, and the military (Flood and Pease 2006). There are higher rates of sexual violence against young women in contexts characterised by gender segregation, an ethic of male sexual conquest, strong male bonding, high alcohol consumption, use of pornography, and sexist social norms.

*... they [groups of young men] have this thing where they sort of compete to see who can make the sickest comment about the females and they make all these comments and see who's the funniest and things like that.*

Bruce, a 16 year-old young man in Martino & Meyenn 2001: 83)

### **Young people's vulnerability to violence in relationships is heightened by strong peer norms, inexperience, age differences in relationships, and lack of access to services.**

Young people's vulnerability to violence in relationships is heightened by various factors. Peer group norms are stronger than among adults and they may exaggerate dominant definitions of masculine and feminine behaviour. This can mean that girls report force or manipulation in first sexual experiences but do not identify it as 'rape', while some boys describe situations



in which they are justified in hitting their girlfriends or pressuring them into sex (Sousa 1990). Adolescents are inexperienced at relationships and may excessively romanticise them, for example interpreting jealousy and abuse as signs of love (Levy 1990: 4-5). Power inequalities are heightened by the typical pattern of girls dating older boys (Gamache 1990: 74). Young people may be reluctant to confide in parents, not taken seriously by adults, and have less access than adults to legal and social services. On the other hand, young people also are less likely to live together or have children, factors which can bind adults into abusive relationship.

### **Young people's violence-supportive attitudes and norms are shaped by pornography and other media.**

Violence-supportive attitudes and norms are shaped by various other social influences, including popular media. A wide range of studies have documented relationships between tolerance for physical or sexual violence and exposure to particular imagery in pornography, television, film, advertising, and electronic games (Flood and Pease 2006). Given the Australian evidence that substantial proportions of boys are regular consumers of X-rated video pornography and Internet pornography (Flood and Hamilton 2003), this may prove to be a significant influence on boys' adherence to violence-supportive attitudes.

## **Social Norms and Practices Relating to Violence**

The second cluster of causes has to do with other social norms and practices related to violence.

### **Violence in the community is a risk factor for intimate partner violence.**

Violence in the community is a risk factor for intimate partner violence. Members of disadvantaged communities may learn a greater tolerance of violence through exposure to violence by their parents, delinquent peers, and others (Flood and Pease 2006).

### **Exposure to violent relationships among peers is a risk factor.**

Young people's social networks have an impact on violence in their intimate relationships. Having friends or acquaintances who are experiencing violence in their

romantic relationships is a risk factor for violence. This may normalise violence, or may represent contact with delinquent peers (Vezina and Hebert 2007).

### **Childhood exposure to family violence is a risk factor.**

Childhood exposure to intimate partner violence contributes to the transmission of violence across generations. Children, and especially boys, who either witness violence or are subjected to violence themselves are more likely as adults to have violence-supportive attitudes and to perpetrate violence (Flood and Pease 2006).

*[My son saw my ex-partner] ... pulling out knives and standing there and literally ... holding them up in the air threatening...and throwing things at me. [My ex-partner would tell my son] you shouldn't hit mum, it's wrong, it's not right [...] some pretty confusing messages there.*  
(Donna, in Howard & Rottam 2008: 28)

## **Access to resources and systems of support**

### **Social disadvantage is a risk factor for violence.**

Rates of reported domestic violence are higher in areas of economic and social disadvantage. Disadvantage may increase the risk of abuse because of factors such as crowding, hopelessness, conflict, stress, or a sense of inadequacy in some men.

Intimate partner violence is shaped also by communities' levels of poverty, unemployment, and collective efficacy – neighbours' willingness to help other neighbours or to intervene in anti-social or violent behaviour.

### **Young women who are socially isolated are more at risk.**

Social isolation is another risk factor. Among young women, rates of domestic violence are higher for those who are not involved in schools or do not experience positive parenting and supervision in their families. In adult couples, social isolation is both a cause and a consequence of domestic violence. Women with strong family and friendship networks experience lower rates of violence.

*I always felt like I wanted somebody to speak to because I was feeling like I was just piling and piling it all on myself ... I always felt that I wanted somebody to speak to, to help me unload some of the things off myself. I couldn't really talk to my mum about things, no matter how close we were, because it was her that I was trying to protect, it was all to do wi' her that I was wanting to talk to somebody about.*

(L, 16 year-old young woman, in Houghton 2008: 59)

### **Personality disorders and adolescent delinquency increase males' likelihood of perpetrating violence.**

Particular personality characteristics are predisposing factors in men's perpetration of partner violence. Men who use violence against their partners tend to have more psychological problems than nonviolent men, including borderline, mood disorders, and depression. Adolescent delinquency – antisocial and aggressive behaviour committed during adolescence – is a predictor of men's later perpetration of sexual assault.

### **Alcohol and drugs may be used by some males to avoid responsibility for perpetrating violence or as a strategy to overcome resistance.**

Men's abuse of alcohol or drugs is another risk factor. Men may use being drunk or high to minimise their own responsibility for violent behaviour. Some men may see drunken women as more sexually available, and may use alcohol as a strategy for overcoming women's resistance.

### **Relationship break-up and separation are particularly risky periods for violence by partners or ex-partners.**

There are also situational factors that increase the risk of intimate partner violence, such as separation and divorce.

## **Causes of violence against women**

### **(1) Gender roles and relations**

Men's agreement with sexist, patriarchal, and sexually hostile attitudes

Violence-supportive social norms regarding gender and sexuality

Male-dominated power relations in relationships and families

Sexist and violence-supportive contexts and cultures

### **(2) Social norms and practices related to violence**

Lack of domestic violence resources

Violence in the community

Childhood experience of intimate partner violence (especially among boys)

### **(3) Access to resources and systems of support**

Low socioeconomic status, poverty, and unemployment

Lack of social connections and social capital

Personality characteristics

Alcohol and substance abuse

Separation and other situational factors

## Part Four: Prevention among children and young people

*Grown ups think they should hide it and shouldn't tell us, but we want to know. We want to be involved [...] we could help make decisions.*  
(group interview in Mullender *et al.*, 2002, cited in Houghton 2008: 48)

Primary prevention strategies – aiming to stop violence before it starts – can lessen children's and young people's involvements in violence. Interventions such as schools or media-based education programs can address the personal, relationship, and social factors identified as contributing to violence against girls and women. Primary prevention strategies can improve the attitudes and norms which feed into violence against girls and women and lessen the gender inequalities which maintain and are maintained by violence.

This report does not aim to offer a comprehensive review or analysis of such strategies, but sketches some of the main reasons why further research, development and implementation of violence prevention work among children and young people should be prioritised and identifies key strategies in such work.

### Violence prevention education programs among children and young people can work.

Across the wide range of strategies used to try to prevent violence against women, there has been little evaluation of the effectiveness of these efforts (Tolan *et al.* 2006). However, the most extensive body of evidence in the evaluation of primary prevention efforts concerns educational programs among children, young people, and young adults. For example, in a recent review of interventions for the primary prevention of partner violence, only 11 programs had been rigorously evaluated (with a pre- and post-test design or a comparison group), and *all* of these addressed adolescent dating violence (Whitaker *et al.* 2006).

#### **Some strategies are effective, others are promising, and all are valuable.**

In discussing particular strategies below, we describe as *effective* those strategies which have a theoretical rationale (there are good reasons for using them), evidence of implementation (they have been tried), and evidence of effectiveness (they have been shown

to work). We describe as *promising* those strategies which have only a theoretical rationale and evidence of implementation, but not evidence of effectiveness. There are other strategies one could describe as *potentially promising*, in that at this stage they have only a theoretical rationale but not have been tried.

However, this does not mean that the best and most important interventions can be found only among those strategies identified as 'effective', while those identified as 'promising' are less valuable. Some of the strategies with the strongest theoretical rationale, such as community development and community mobilisation, have been implemented only rarely and evaluated even less often. At the same time, their strong rationale makes them critical elements in future violence prevention efforts. On the other hand, other efforts such as school education programs have a substantial body of evidence supporting their effectiveness, reflecting the fact that they are a common form of violence prevention. The level of evidence supporting their use is in part an artefact of their widespread adoption, as well as their genuine effectiveness. They are undoubtedly valuable, and at the same time they must be complemented by other promising strategies with equally compelling rationales.

#### **Violence prevention education programs among children and young people can work.**

There is now substantial evidence of the effectiveness of youth violence prevention programs (Mattaini and McGuire 2006: 187). For example, from a series of US evaluations of violence prevention education, delivered in schools and universities in particular, it is clear such interventions can have positive effects on participants' attitudes towards and participation in intimate partner violence (Flood 2005-2006). Male and female secondary school and university students who have attended rape education sessions show less adherence to rape myths, express less rape-supportive attitudes, and/or report greater victim empathy than those in control groups.

However, far too few interventions have been evaluated. And among those that have, the evidence is that not all educational interventions are effective, changes in attitudes often 'rebound' to pre-intervention levels one or two months after the intervention, and some even become worse. Furthermore, existing evaluations often are limited in methodological and conceptual terms (Cornelius and Resseguie 2007).

Nevertheless, education programs which are intensive, lengthy, and use a variety of pedagogical approaches have been shown to produce positive and lasting change in attitudes and behaviours (Flood 2005-2006).

**Programs have been shown to produce positive and lasting change in attitudes and behaviours.**

Very few education programs have been evaluated over periods longer than a few weeks or months. However, one of the very few education programs with evidence for long-term change in attitudes and behaviours is the US-based Safe Dates program. Evaluations of the Safe Dates program (which included a ten-session school curriculum, a theatre production performed by peers, and a poster contest) found that four years after the program, adolescents who had received the program continued to report less physical and sexual dating violence perpetration (and victimisation) than those who had not (Foshee *et al.* 2004). Whitaker *et al.* (2006) come to similar, largely positive conclusions regarding the effectiveness of programs aimed at preventing adolescent dating violence, although they stress that such programs need much more work.

More information is required regarding the effectiveness of various aspects of the delivery of violence prevention programs in schools, such as their timing, locale, and content (Wolfe and Jaffe 2003). In relation to content, interviews with young people themselves suggest that violence and sexuality programs in schools should address skills in negotiating the complexity and fluidity of consent, and explore more widely the ethical negotiation of pleasure and danger (Carmody and Willis 2006: 64, 84).

**Primary prevention strategies can lessen girls' and women's risks of victimisation.**

There is some evidence too that education programs focused on primary prevention among college women can reduce women's risk of victimisation (Yeater and O'Donohue 1999). Such programs typically address the behaviours in which women can engage which will either decrease their risk of being sexually assaulted or increase their chances of escaping from a sexual assault. Recent narrative reviews of psycho-educational programs for young women aimed at identifying and avoiding high-risk situations have described their results as 'mixed', but Hanson and Broom (2005)'s cumulative meta-analysis finds instead that such programs have a small beneficial effect.

For example, some US education programs aimed at primary prevention have been demonstrated to reduce college women's risks of subsequent victimisation. Self-defence programs may help to increase women's resistance particularly to sexual assault by strangers, but their efficacy is only poorly documented (Yeater and O'Donohue 1999).

Less evidence is available concerning the effectiveness of violence prevention education among other young adult populations such as professional athletes.

**Other promising strategies take place outside school settings.**

There are other promising strategies of primary prevention among children and young people which take place outside school settings, although there is less evidence of their effectiveness. As Vezina and Herbert (2007) and Rosewater (2003) argue, prevention programs should not only address young people in schools, but those who have dropped out of school, and should address young people through other means and contexts associated with increased risks of victimisation. These include homeless young people, children living in poverty or in families receiving welfare, teenage mothers, and girls and young women under protective services care. Such programs, at least those which have been evaluated, are relatively rare. In a review of adolescent primary prevention programs, Whitaker *et al.* (2006) note that all but one of 11 programs were in school settings and universally targeted. They emphasise the need for culturally specific interventions, programs targeted to specific at-risk populations and environments, and using settings such as families, community and faith-based organisations, and media. Similarly, Vezina and Herbert (2007) argue for targeting the internalising and externalising problems among young people which are associated with domestic violence, such as depression, illegal and delinquent behaviour.

Among children and young people, it has been recommended that violence prevention efforts include interventions targeted to specific at-risk populations and environments. As Rosewater (2003) notes in the US context, the young people who are most vulnerable to domestic violence (whether as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses) are those who are out of school and unemployed, live in poverty, have incarcerated parents, are receiving welfare, are leaving juvenile detention or foster care, or are young parents. Indigenous young people are an important priority for violence prevention, given their high levels of exposure to violence.

Interventions should be linked to other family healing strategies, address issues of drug and alcohol abuse, and encourage indigenous young people's participation in secondary and tertiary education (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2003). Noting that a range of internalising and externalising problems are associated with domestic violence, and many are more visible than domestic violence, Vezina and Herbert (2007) argue that they should be targeted in interventions among children and young people. These include depressive symptoms and suicidal behaviour, and high risk behaviours including illegal drug use and delinquent behaviour.

Prevention efforts among young people can address the associations between domestic violence and poverty, low work attachment, and low educational attainment, and other social factors. For young children, promising strategies include the provision of quality child care, home visiting programs, intensive clinical work with battered mothers and their young children, and encouraging parental involvement in children's early education and school. Among children and young adults, relevant measures include mentoring programs, premarital relationship education, and welfare-to-work strategies. Given that parental and adult supervision is protective against girls' exposure to intimate partner violence, interventions among parents and other adults in young people's social networks are important strategies. And, given that emotionally unsupportive and harsh parenting is a risk factor for domestic violence, interventions to encourage better parenting practices also are valuable (Vezina and Herbert 2007).

### **School-based efforts are complemented by strategies of community engagement and community mobilisation.**

Given the evidence that social norms, gender roles, and power relations underpin intimate partner violence, strategies that address these will be critical to successful prevention efforts. There is a growing consensus that strategies of community engagement and community mobilisation are central to violence prevention (Family Violence Prevention Fund 2004). Violence prevention should build local communities' capacity to respond effectively to violence, encourage their ownership of the issue, and address the social contexts in which intimate partner violence occurs (Rosewater 2003). Given the evidence of implementation and a theoretical rationale for efforts involving community development and community mobilisation (further below), such strategies are promising ones.

With regard to young people, strategies of community engagement and community mobilisation provide a valuable complement to school-based efforts. They address children and young people in the other social and cultural contexts in which they live, and they work to change the social and community conditions which lead to violence.

### **Violence prevention efforts must be sensitive to cultural contexts and the needs of different groups.**

*In order for programs to be effective and acceptable to the Aboriginal community, they must incorporate Aboriginal involvement at all levels, and be flexible, building on Aboriginal culture, experience, skills and prior knowledge. SNAICC 2005b: 42, citing Butterworth & Candy 1998.*

There is a consensus in the violence prevention field that interventions should be 'culturally appropriate' – sensitive to cultural diversities, responsive to the character and constitution of violence in that particular cultural context, and using culturally appropriate strategies (Menjivar and Salcido 2002; Kasturirangan *et al.* 2004). This applies to youth-focused violence prevention as much as to any other violence prevention strategy, and is relevant in *all* contexts and communities in Australia. However, perhaps where its need has been most evident is in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), communities. Prevention strategies addressing intimate partner violence (or other forms of 'family violence') in Aboriginal and Islander communities are rare, and evaluated interventions are even rarer. Nevertheless, a variety of promising interventions have been enacted (Partnerships Against Domestic Violence 2003c). Memmott *et al.* (2006) provide a useful overview of evaluated interventions in Aboriginal and Islander communities. Programs to address 'family violence' in Aboriginal and Islander communities must be community-driven, based on partnerships between and among community and government agencies, and use holistic approaches to community violence (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Taskforce on Violence 1999; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 2006; Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development 2000; Partnerships



Against Domestic Violence 2003c). Similar principles have been articulated in relation to immigrant and CALD communities in Australia (Department of Community Development 2006).

*If you speak to adults make sure they understand about your family and religion and they don't take things the wrong way. Like, sometimes, goray [white people] will not know about izzat and shame and they can make you do things that bring shame on the family. You are left without any help or support from the community, if they feel you have gone against the religion. I don't say it is always right, but sometimes we have to sort things out in our own way – white people can never really do things in the same way if they don't understand. (16 year-old South Asian\* young woman in Houghton 2008: 55, citing Mullender et al. 2002)*

Whether in immigrant and CALD communities or elsewhere, effective violence prevention in communities depends on documenting local conditions, engaging community members, addressing communities' perceived needs, involving leaders, and changing the social and community conditions which lead to violence.

Young people with disabilities experience higher rates of both physical and sexual assault than the general population, including in their homes (Sobsey 1994). Young women with intellectual disabilities are at particular risk, with one study suggesting that 68 per cent will experience sexual abuse before they reach eighteen (Frohmader 2002). Prevention programs must pay particular attention to the needs of this group. For instance, 'home' for children and young people with disabilities may comprise residential institutions, community-based group homes, boarding houses, hospitals, psychiatric wards, or nursing homes (Frohmader 2002), so it is essential that prevention programs encompass these settings. This is especially important as young people with disabilities are less likely to receive senior secondary education, and so may well miss interventions designed for the later years of high school (Sobsey 1994).

## We must address boys and men

### **There is a compelling rationale for engaging men and boys.**

There is a compelling rationale for engaging men and boys in efforts to prevent intimate partner violence. First, violence prevention must address boys and men because, while most boys and men do not perpetrate intimate partner violence, intimate partner violence is perpetrated largely by males. Second, constructions of masculinity play a crucial role in shaping some boys' and men's perpetration of physical and sexual assault. Third, as we note below, boys' and men's roles in preventing violence against women have been neglected, with responsibility for prevention placed entirely at girls' and women's feet. Fourth, and more hopefully, boys and men have a positive role to play in helping to end men's violence against women (Flood 2005-2006). The last element here embodies the recognition that violence is an issue of concern to women and men alike and that men have a stake in ending violence against women.

*When I was in high school I found out my best friend was mistreating his girlfriend. [...] Once, we were at a party and he was insulting her, embarrassing her in front of other people. I let him know it wasn't the way to act. He was defensive, kind of aggressive. He didn't appreciate it. Later I talked to him one-on-one and told him he needed to be a better boyfriend. [...] Today I'm still friends with her and after all these years she still remembers what I did, and appreciates the support I gave her, even though I wish I'd done more. (John, now aged 31, in National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline 2008)*

The increasing focus on men as targets of prevention efforts represents a significant shift in the field of violence prevention. While men have long been addressed in secondary- and tertiary-based interventions as perpetrators, now they are also being addressed as 'partners' in prevention (Flood 2005-2006). Whether in accounts of violence prevention in indigenous, immigrant, or other communities, it is common to find an emphasis on the need to engage men in this work (Michau 2005). There is a growing body of experience

\* In British English terminology, 'South Asia' usually refers to the Indian subcontinent, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

and knowledge regarding effective violence prevention practice among boys and young men, often grounded in wider efforts to involve men in building gender equality, as various reviews have documented (Flood 2003; 2008).

**Efforts to engage boys and men must involve not only education but activism.**

Efforts to engage males in the primary prevention of intimate partner violence have focused on face-to-face educational interventions and on social marketing. While both forms of strategy are vital, some advocates suggest that we must also move beyond them to foster more activist involvements (Peacock *et al.* 2006). Men's groups and networks, oriented towards wider social change and working in collaboration with women and women's groups, are needed to change the social norms and power relations which underpin men's violence against women. In addition, actively involving boys and men in efforts to end violence against women enhances the effectiveness of this work and (young) men's sense of a personal stake in this project (Kaufman 2001).

**Prevention programs should be tailored for males' levels of risk.**

As with interventions in any population group, prevention programs among men and boys should be tailored for levels of risk for intimate partner violence. Interventions may be briefer among general populations of males (with the caveat that they be intensive or lengthy enough to create lasting change), more extensive among males showing violence-supportive attitudes or other risk factors, and most intensive (involving extensive psychosocial and legal interventions) among males who are already using violence against intimate partners or others.

While we have argued that there are powerful reasons for focusing our efforts on boys and men, this does not mean now neglecting girls and women.

## **We must address girls and women**

**Historically, girls and women have been the focus, and this can be victim-blaming.**

Historically, girls and women have been the focus of primary prevention efforts addressing intimate partner violence. Girls and women are taught in school programs and elsewhere to watch out for the 'warning signs' of abuse in relationships, to avoid risky situations or respond effectively to them, to use clear and effective communication in sexual and intimate situations, and to reject violence-supportive myths and norms (Hanson and Gidycz 1993). While such strategies have an obvious rationale, they have also been criticised for potentially exacerbating victim-blaming. They may imply that it is women's responsibility to avoid being raped or assaulted, not men's to avoid raping or assaulting. And they can result in self-blame when some women inevitably are unsuccessful at applying the skills and lessons learnt (Yeater and O'Donohue 1999).

**However, we must continue to address girls and women.**

*I feel that when my mum was my age, before she got into an abusive relationship with my dad, if she had heard a group of teens her age talking about abuse, maybe it would have prevented her getting into that situation.*

Alicia, 16 year-old young woman in National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline (2008)

On the other hand, it would be problematic to focus education efforts exclusively on men. Not all men will participate in education programs, those who do are likely to have a lower potential of perpetrating intimate partner violence, and even if all men participated, no intervention is 100 per cent effective (Yeater and O'Donohue 1999). Failing to direct violence prevention efforts to women would be to miss the opportunity to increase women's critical understandings of intimate partner violence and to build on women's already-existing skills in recognising, resisting, and rejecting

violence. In addition, educating women can change men: by shifting women's expectations of partners and intimate relations, interventions may increase the pressures on and incentives for heterosexual men to adopt non-violent practices and identities. As Adams-Curtis and Forbes (2004) argue, interventions can harness men's motivations to be accepted and liked by women, by encouraging women's unwillingness to associate with sexist and aggressive men. Yes, this is unfair, but it is no more unfair or damaging than the consequences of current gender relations.

### **Programs and strategies for males and females should collaborate and complement each other.**

Primary prevention strategies addressing the potential victims of men's intimate partner violence, that is, women, are a desirable component of violence prevention programming. There is evidence that they can lessen women's risks of victimisation and re-victimisation, as we discussed above. Yeater and O'Donohue (1999) provide a useful discussion of ideal elements of education programs in this context. They suggest that women's and men's education programs should complement each other, to create synergistic effects which will accelerate shifts in social norms and gender relations. Primary prevention efforts among women also can move beyond education programs towards forms of community-based empowerment and mobilisation.

## **We must address children and young people already living with violence**

While our focus is largely on the primary prevention of violence against women, we must also adopt and extend 'secondary' prevention strategies, meaning, in the first instance, strategies addressing those children and young people who are already living with domestic violence and/or direct abuse. As outlined above, such children and young people, particularly boys and young men, are at greater risk of going on to perpetrate violence in their own intimate relationships than those who have not experienced violence. Such an outcome is not inevitable, and it is important to recognise the capacity of children and young people who have experienced domestic violence (along with that of their mothers and step-mothers) to recover from its effects in supportive and safe environments (Humphreys, Houghton and Ellis 2008). More than this, young people's "achievements,

advocacy against violence and violence free lives as they grow up stand testimony to the fact that children who have experienced domestic abuse often become the strongest advocates against violence" (Houghton 2008: 47).

*'I used to tell teachers and my friends at school what he was like and they, I could see they believed me but they couldn't do anything about it. ... it didn't really help me a lot because they didn't really help me help my mum.'*

(Jackie, 19 year-old young woman, in Houghton 2008: 65, citing McGee 2000)

However, not all children have an equal capacity to recover in these ways. There are social, educational and psychological factors which affect a young person's resilience in the face of adversity such as violence. Secondary prevention strategies can, for some children and young people, make all the difference.

For example, schools and community groups are important sites for detecting abuse, and can adopt policies and procedures to help children and young people who are living with domestic violence. School-based educational programs can enable children and young people to recognise violence and name it for what it is, understand their rights and responsibilities, and build the skills to establish and maintain respectful relationships. Community and educational settings therefore play a key role in helping children and young people who have experienced violence to come to terms with feelings of anger, mistrust and grief, and go on to lead positive lives.

Remembering that domestic violence against adult women is often accompanied by violence against their children, improvements in service responses to all family members affected by violence are also vital for a range of reasons. Those who have experienced violence need not only to be protected from further violence, but also respected, supported and encouraged in their own efforts to deal with it.

Another form of secondary prevention is interventions among boys and young men already using violence. Interventions with these boys and young men may be

valuable in changing what are potentially life-long violent trajectories. For example, in a comparison of the histories of young men who are repeat sexual assaulters and young men who have sexually coerced girls in the past but now ceased, the latter expressed more remorse, held the girl(s) less responsible, and were less likely to describe the violent behaviour as 'exciting' or 'titillating' (Abbey and McAuslan 2004). Secondary prevention strategies among such young men can influence such attitudes and lessen the possibility of future perpetration. Finally, enhanced prevention campaigning can increase reporting and disclosure around violence and sexual assault. This needs to be recognised with appropriate resource allocation to ensure that any increase in demand for services to assist young people living with violence can be met.

## Conclusion

Vastly increased efforts need to be made, and resources mobilised, at national, state, and local levels, in the area of primary prevention of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on children and young people. A multi-faceted prevention strategy, which engages boys and young men, is essential to maximising positive outcomes for all children and young people.

It should be recognised from the outset that there are no 'quick fixes' for the long-term social change towards which prevention efforts are directed. However, there is a sound and growing evidence base for the effectiveness of primary prevention work. Recent research by the World Health Organisation, culminating in the World Report on Violence and Health, stated unequivocally that violence

can be prevented and its impact reduced [...] The factors that contribute to violent responses – whether they are factors of attitude and behaviour or related to larger social, economic, political and cultural conditions – can be changed (World Health Organisation 2002: 3).

The engagement of men and boys is essential for prevention efforts to come to fruition. In all areas, particular attention should be paid to addressing the varying needs of Indigenous and CALD young people, young people living in rural areas, same-sex attracted young people and young people with a disability.

We now have frameworks for action within which change can be envisaged and instigated in policy and practice terms (such as those by VicHealth (2007) and Humphreys, Houghton and Ellis (2008)). The evidence shows that violence can be prevented, and its harm reduced. We know that if we take the primary prevention of violence against women seriously, if we plan accordingly, if we ensure the resources, skills and time necessary, then we can reach the stage where children and young people grow up in an Australia free of violence against women.

## Recommendations

Substantial work has been undertaken in recent years to develop frameworks for action, policy-making and research in the area of primary prevention of violence against women. For example, in Australia, VicHealth's *Preventing Violence Before It Occurs: A framework and background paper to guide the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria* (2007) provides a blueprint for conceptualising the problem and directing efforts across sectors, over the short, mid and long-terms. Internationally, a Scottish literature review titled *Better Outcomes for Children and Young People affected by Domestic Abuse – Directions for Good Practice* (Humphreys, Houghton and Ellis 2008) focuses specifically on work with and for children and young people. Both reports offer extensive advice and recommendations regarding the systems and structures which must be put into place to ensure the long-term potential to effect change, and they are complemented by a series of further frameworks for action.<sup>13</sup>

While recognising the breadth and detail of such work and the directions for action they advocate, here we focus on key, practical steps that can be taken to reach young people in our efforts to end violence against women. We have also included further steps which reflect the White Ribbon campaign's focus on the positive roles men and boys can play ending violence against women. The recommendations have been organised into national, state, and local or community levels, although some span more than one level of action.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Davis *et al.* (2006), Oregon Department of Human Services (2006), and World Health Organization (2002).



## At the National level:

Within the context of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Their Children, the Federal Government should develop a specific strategy on the primary prevention of violence against women. In relation to children and young people, the focus of the Government's prevention efforts at the national level should be on providing leadership, building capacity, and driving change through public awareness raising. Key strategies include:

- The development of multi-media awareness-raising campaigns for children and young people, including websites and television campaigns, addressing the attitudes and norms which feed into violence against girls and women (as well as providing information on recognising violence and where to find support or help).
  - Such campaigns should include content specifically addressing sexist and violence-supportive constructions of masculinity and sexuality.
- The provision of resources and programs on respectful relationships in every higher education campus throughout the country, with existing student groups working in partnership with academic departments, university and community organisations.
- Partnerships with statutory organisations such as the Australian Human Rights Commission to develop advocacy and resources on the prevention of violence against women and girls, and for children and young people living with violence.

In addition, the Federal Government should:

- Enhance boys' and men's positive roles as agents of change at every level and in every domain of its violence prevention activity, both as allies for and targets of prevention work, including by:
  - Developing or reviewing national policies in relation to the role of men and boys in ending violence against girls and women;
  - Reinforcing the involvement of boys and men in programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

- Support non-government efforts to engage boys and men in ending violence against women, by:
  - Supporting networking of non-governmental organisations that work with boys and men to end violence against women;
  - Encouraging partnerships between women's and men's organizations working to end violence.
  - Supporting collaborative learning and the development of best practice by supporting dialogues and conferences focused on engaging boys and men in ending violence against women;
  - Promoting partnerships between civil society and the corporate sector to fund and implement initiatives aimed at increasing boys' and men's involvement in promoting gender equality and non-violence.
- Address men's roles as gatekeepers of policy and practice in relation to violence prevention, for example through training in issues of gender and violence for key Government officials including members of the police, judiciary, legal profession and others.

## At the state and territory level:

State and territory governments similarly should factor the primary prevention of violence against women into their whole-of-government work, engaging ministers and policy makers across portfolios. Their focus should be on schools and TAFE based work, as well as on supporting local government and community-based initiatives. State and territory governments should:

- Prioritise violence prevention as a human rights issue across government, engaging the support of ministers and departmental commitment in the portfolios of, at a minimum, education, health, community services, women's policy, youth, children, local government, justice and police.
- Integrate educational programs on respectful relationships into the curriculum and culture of every school, involving the expansion and implementation of existing schools-based respectful relationships programs, as well as training and support for teachers and other school staff. Make this a strategic priority with implementation targets and allocated budget.
- Establish a violence prevention position in each



region, to coordinate primary prevention with young people, with a particular focus on engaging boys and young men. These positions should be situated within a key agency such as a domestic violence or sexual assault service, local health service, community or social services organisation, or local government.

- Ensure training for staff in all services and agencies that work with children and young people on the impact of domestic violence and violence in dating relationships.

### **At the local/community level:**

- Local governments should take a coordinating role in violence prevention, drawing on best practice in local and community policy and programs throughout the country.
- Local governments should build the capacity of services and agencies in the education, youth, community and violence against women sectors to develop community-based approaches to violence prevention.
  - Including approaches focused on encouraging boys' and men's positive roles in ending violence against women.
- Local governments should develop resources and campaigns through which adult men (and women) – including sports coaches, teachers, parents, family members, and other potential mentors – can teach boys and young men that there is no place for violence in intimate relationships and families.
- Universities should make systematic efforts to prevent violence among their young adult populations by:
  - Including violence prevention education as a routine element in their induction programs for new and returning students;
  - Funding salaried positions for campus violence prevention educators;
  - Providing and supporting other campus-based strategies including social marketing and social norms campaigns and peer education.
- Schools should integrate the prevention of violence against girls and women throughout their curricula and culture, through the implementation of respectful relationships curricula, training and support for teachers and other school staff, and other elements of a whole-of-school approach.
- Youth services should integrate the prevention of violence into their policy and practice, through both through intensive service responses to children and young people at risk of either victimisation or perpetration and general violence prevention efforts. The latter could include:
  - Discussion groups for young men and young women on sex, relationships and violence;
  - Other strategies aimed at encouraging peer cultures of gender equality and non-violence.
- Workplaces, businesses, sporting clubs and trade unions, including those with significant participation by young people or men in particular, should encourage cultures of gender equality and non-violence, by:
  - Adopting organisational policies and procedures to ensure a safe, supportive and inclusive environment for women;
  - Providing workforce training on issues of gender and violence;
  - Running violence prevention education campaigns addressing their members and the wider communities with which they are associated.
- Violence prevention and social justice advocates and organisations should initiate and nurture groups, networks, and campaigns which mobilise boys and men as advocates for the elimination of violence against women.
- Local area health services should include prevention of violence against women in their health promotion plans, and ensure the training of health professionals, not only on the identification of possible victimisation, but also on the health impacts of domestic violence on women, children and young people.
- Parenting, family, and fathering services should work to prevent violence and abuse by men who are fathers, encouraging respectful and non-violent relationships in their training, materials, and service provision.
- Organisations and initiatives addressing the education and wellbeing of boys should include materials and strategies addressing violence, both the violence to which boys are subjected and the violence they may perpetrate or condone themselves.

- Community leaders and institutions, including spiritual and religious leaders and churches, mosques and other places of worship, should promote norms of gender equality and non-violence in their public statements and their everyday practice.
- Researchers and scholars should contribute to violence prevention efforts among children and young people by:
  - Contributing to the implementation and evaluation of school-based and other strategies of prevention;
  - Conducting research on the dynamics and trajectories of both violence and non-violence among boys and young men, drawing on critical scholarship on men and masculinities and feminist and other scholarship on interpersonal violence.

Violence against women is one of our most significant social problems, with deep, long lasting impacts on young people. Action must not be left to others: both as individuals and working together, we can make a difference.

## Introduction

The *Personal Safety Survey* (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2005), cited in the body of this report, calculated national incidence figures for violence against women, and also broke these figures down by state/territory. However, the only large-scale population survey of children and young people which obtained similar data about their experiences of violence in each state/territory was the National Crime Prevention survey, *Young People and Domestic Violence* (2001). This survey of 5,000 young Australians' experience of domestic violence (aged 12-20), found that, while nationally 23.4% of young people had experienced an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother, the figures by state/territory varied from 20% (in the ACT) to 28% (in Tasmania). Percentages for verbal, emotional and psychological domestic violence also varied. For example, in the national sample, over half (58%) of the young people surveyed had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, while this figure varied from 48% (in Tasmania) to 62% (in Queensland). State/territory figures from these publications, as well as state-specific sources where available, are detailed below.

## New South Wales

### Young people's experiences

- In NSW, 24% of young people (aged 12-20) surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001). This included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things.
- Over half (59%) of the young people surveyed in NSW had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, 30% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her, and 12% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (National Crime Prevention 2001).
- In approximately 2,500 domestic assault incidents recorded in NSW in 2004, the offender was a parent/guardian<sup>14</sup> (People 2005).

### Violence against women generally

- Approximately 1,153,000 women in NSW have experienced physical violence since the age of 16, with an average of 192,000 experiencing violence each year (NSW Department of Health 2005, calculating from Australian Institute of Criminology/ IVAWS 2004 figures)
- 4.5% of NSW women interviewed for the *Personal Safety Survey* had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).
- 17 women in NSW were killed for motive classified as 'domestic' in the year 2005/6 (Davies & Mouzos 2007).<sup>15</sup>
- 25,761 domestic assault incidents were recorded in NSW in 2004. In 62% of these incidents, the offender was a current or former intimate partner of the victim. (People 2005)
- NSW has an average of 392.9 incidents of domestic violence reported for every 100,000 people (Goh, *et al.* 2006). A briefing paper to the NSW Parliamentary Library notes that:
  - the regions of NSW with the highest recorded rate were the Far West (1259.2 per 100,000), North Western (996.8 per 100,000) and Northern (622.0 per 100,000). The average rate per 100,000 people in Sydney was the lowest of all regions in NSW at 336.4. Within the region of Sydney, the areas with the highest rates of recorded domestic violence related assaults were Blacktown (645.2 per 100,000), Outer South Western Sydney (610.2 per 100,000) and Inner Sydney (479.0 per 100,000) (Drabsch 2007)

<sup>14</sup> The author cites 10% of the 25,761 domestic assault incidents reported in NSW for that year as being perpetrated by a parent or guardian.

## Victoria

### Young people's experiences

- In Victoria, 23% of young people surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001). This included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things.
- Over half (56%) of the young people surveyed in Victoria had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, 30% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her, and 10% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (National Crime Prevention 2001).
- The Victorian Department of Human Services calculates that domestic violence is the most commonly recorded parental characteristic in substantiated child protection cases. It was a factor in 52% of such cases in 2000-01 (DHS 2002).
- In Victoria in 2007/08 children were present at 11,303 incidents of family violence attended by police, which is 36% of total incidents. The figure remains consistent each year at around 40% (Victoria Police (2008) Crime Statistics 2007-2008, Victoria Police, Melbourne)

### Violence against women generally

- 6.5% of Victorian women interviewed for the *Personal Safety Survey* had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months, above the national average of 5.8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).
- 16 women in Victoria were killed for motive classified as 'domestic' in the year 2005/6 (Davies & Mouzos 2007).<sup>16</sup>
- Of the 21,622 family violence incident reports made to police, almost 80% of the victims were female, while 80% of the defendants were male (Victoria Police Crime Statistics, 2000-01, Victoria Police, 2002).
- Intimate partner violence is responsible for more ill-health and premature death in Victorian women aged 15-44 than any other risk factor, including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking (VicHealth 2004)

## Queensland

### Young people's experiences

- In Queensland, 25% of young people surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001), above the national average of 23.4%. This included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things.
- Rates of verbal and psychological domestic violence witnessed by young people in Queensland were significantly higher than the national average. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of the young people surveyed in Queensland had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother (national average 56%). 36% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her (national average 30%), and 13% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (national average 10%) (National Crime Prevention 2001).

### Violence against women generally

- 6.7% of Queensland women interviewed for the *Personal Safety Survey* had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months, above the national average of 5.8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).
- In Queensland there was a 69 percent increase in the number of female homicide victims in one year, from 16 in 2004/5, to 27 in 2005/6 (Davies & Mouzos 2007). 63% of these women were killed for a motive classified as 'domestic.'

<sup>15-19,21</sup> This figure is calculated from the total number of female homicides (table p.45) divided by the percentage of those homicides listed as having a 'domestic' motive (table p.58) in Australian Institute of Criminology (2007), Davies, M and Mouzos, J, *Homicide in Australia: 2005-06 National Homicide Monitoring Program annual report*, Research and Public Policy Series No. 77, Canberra.

## Western Australia

### Young people's experiences

- In Western Australia, 21% of young people surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001). This included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things.
- Over half (59%) of the young people surveyed in Western Australia had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, 27% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her, and 9% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (National Crime Prevention 2001).

### Violence against women generally

- 5.3% of Western Australian women interviewed for the *Personal Safety Survey* had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).
- 5 women in Western Australia were killed for motive classified as 'domestic' in the year 2005/6 (Davies & Mouzos 2007).<sup>17</sup>

## South Australia

### Young people's experiences

- In South Australia, 22% of young people surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001). This included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things.
- Over half (58%) of the young people surveyed in South Australia had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, 28% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her, and 8% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (National Crime Prevention 2001).

### Violence against women generally

- 6.1% of South Australian women interviewed for the *Personal Safety Survey* had experienced some form of physical or sexual violence in the previous 12 months, above the national average of 5.8% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).
- 11 women in South Australia were killed for motive classified as 'domestic' in the year 2005/6 (Davies & Mouzos 2007).<sup>18</sup>



## Tasmania

### Young people's experiences

- In Tasmania, 28% of young people surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001). This was the highest level reported for any state/territory in a national survey of 5,000 young people (the national average was 23.4%). This included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things.
- Nearly half (48%) of the young people surveyed in Tasmania had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, 34% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her, and 14% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (National Crime Prevention 2001).

## Northern Territory

### Young people's experiences

- In the Northern Territory, 21% of young people surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001).
- Over half (52%) of the young people surveyed in the Northern Territory had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, 30% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her, and 8% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (National Crime Prevention 2001).

### Violence against women generally

- Two women in the Northern Territory were killed for motive classified as 'domestic' in the year 2005/6 (Davies & Mouzos 2007).<sup>19</sup>

## Australian Capital Territory

### Young people's experiences

- In the ACT, 20% of young people surveyed reported experiencing an act of physical domestic violence against their mother or step-mother (National Crime Prevention 2001). This included throwing things at her, hitting her, or using a knife or a gun against her, as well as threats and attempts to do these things.
- Over half (58%) of the young people surveyed in the ACT had witnessed their father/step-father yell loudly at their mother/step mother, 29% had witnessed him put her down or humiliate her, and 9% had seen their father/step-father not let their mother/step-mother see her family or friends (National Crime Prevention 2001).
- When the presence of children was recorded in incidents of domestic violence reported to and attended by police in the ACT over the period 2001-4, 70% of incidents show them as being present (Holder 2007).
- Nearly 650 children and young people per year are recorded by police as being present or involved in domestic violence incidents (Holder 2007)<sup>20</sup>.

### Violence against women generally

- Two women in the ACT were killed for motive classified as 'domestic' in the year 2005/6 (Davies & Mouzos 2007).<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Holder draws on statistics obtained from the ACT Police Family Violence Statistical Database, 2001-4.

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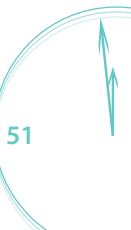
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